

CUK-H0435-17-P7799

JOURNAL  
OF

THE DEPARTMENT  
OF  
ENGLISH



410  
J826

820.7

B874

Vol. XVII

No. 1

1981-82



UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA

THE JOURNAL of the Department of English, Calcutta University.

*Annual Subscription* : Inland : Rs. 10·00 (inclusive of postage).

Foreign : £ 1-6s. (inclusive of postage). *Single Copy* : Inland

Rs. 5·00 (exclusive of postage). Foreign : 16s. (exclusive of postage).

All materials intended for publication in this journal, books for review, business correspondence, subscriptions (Cheques should be made payable to "The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, B.A. & F., Calcutta University"), reprints, journals, etc. should be addressed to :

Secretary, U.C.A.C.,  
Journal & Bulletin Section,  
Asutosh Building,  
Calcutta University,  
Calcutta-700073.

410  
J 826

JCU 431

P 7799

*Place of Publication*

Asutosh Building, Calcutta University, Calcutta-700073

●  
*Publisher*

DILIP KUMAR MUKHERJEE

Comp

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## KING LEAR : THE LAST FOUR LINES

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JYOTI BHATTACHARYA

IF *Hamlet* was the Shakespeare-play of the nineteenth century, *King Lear* seems to have become the Shakespeare-play of our time. The play seems to be strikingly relevant to some large experiences and tensions of our world.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that contemporary criticism of and commentary on *King Lear*, including certain stage productions, tend to become at the same time implicit critical observations and commentaries on our own world.

It is now well-established that the play is, among other things, the drama of a social crisis. Edwin Muir spoke of this crisis as that of a violent period of transition when 'the medieval world with its communal tradition was slowly dying, and the modern individualist world was bringing itself to birth.' He also said, 'Of the great tragedies *King Lear* is the only one in which two ideas of society are directly confronted, and the old generation and the new are set face to face, each assured of its own right to power.'<sup>2</sup> John Danby found that the play dramatizes two views of Nature, and he related them to two societies, —the society of medieval vision, and the society of nascent capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Bernard McElroy, agreeing with Danby, states : '*King Lear* is, among many other things, a paradigm of the waning medieval hierarchy confronting the onset of pragmatic materialism.'<sup>4</sup> The social crisis has been described in various other terms by other critics. Usually, such a crisis has many levels and dimensions, and *King Lear* seems to include most of them within its titanic conspectus.

One aspect of such a crisis is a crisis in language. Language is not only a given medium of communication, it is also continually created by men in society. It is a social product. When a social order breaks down, or—what is often the same thing—, when a new social order is about to break through, the language of the community is also

likely to suffer a process of disturbance and re-organization. I do not mean that people suddenly begin to speak an altogether new vocabulary or concoct a new grammar. But during such a crisis certain words do change their meanings and certain new words gain currency. The fissure in the society may sometimes be identified as a split in the meanings contained in a single word. Danby has shown this split occurring in the word *Nature* as it is variously used in *King Lear*.<sup>5</sup>

But language is not only words. Language is also tone and gesture. It includes the modes and manners of speech. The crisis in language here is not primarily philological. At its root is a moral crisis, involving tradition and culture, politics and philosophy, belief and conduct. If, echoing Bernard McElroy, we may speak of *King Lear*, in broad terms, as 'a paradigm of confrontation between two societies', we may also speak of the play as equally a paradigm of confrontation between several modes of language.

The more important words and collocations in *King Lear* have been by now thoroughly studied by a number of critics. Key-words, theme-carriers, images and symbols, undertones and overtones of meanings, syntax, verse-rhythms, prose-structures, phonetic effects, styles — such matters have been studied and continue to receive acute critical attention. But, I venture to suggest, it has not been sufficiently stressed that modes of language are also under examination in this play. Although Robert Heilman did point out that the first scene of the play

in one sense ... initiates a lesson in language,<sup>6</sup>

yet the point does not seem to have received further attention.<sup>7</sup> One result of the comparative neglect of this point is that the quieter lines of the play, the plain-looking ones, remain inconspicuous.

## II

I now wish to comment on the last four lines of the play in the light of the foregoing general remarks. It appears to me that those last words, —

The weight of this sad time we must obey ;  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
The oldest hath borne most : we that are young  
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

— are very important for this 'lesson in language' and for our understanding of the whole play.

Editorial comments on those last lines have been usually more concerned with a textual question about the speech-heading. The Quarto gives these lines to 'Duke', i.e., the Duke of Albany, and the Folio gives them to 'Edg', i.e., Edgar. At one time some critics used to argue that the last speech of the play should be spoken by the person of the highest rank among the survivors, and according to that rule of 'decorum' the Duke of Albany should be the speaker. Others argued, quite rightly, that the words 'we that are young' are more appropriate to Edgar, and the Folio is right. Sheldon Zitner has recently provided a powerful argument against the criterion of 'decorum' being applied here.<sup>8</sup>

But that, I submit, is a minor matter, although not to be neglected. It is a mistake to think that we have done our work when we have agreed with the Folio-reading here. It is necessary to read this speech of Edgar as a summing-up of at least some of the major experiences of the play. Such a summing-up could come only from Edgar — who has lived through storm and thunder under threat of death in the disguise of a mad beggar and has emerged as the champion victorious over evil at the moment when triumph of evil seemed to be complete. Edgar's speech, of course, does not sum up all the experiences of the play. No summing-up could do that. The play cannot be replaced by a string of statements. But the play does need a summing-up; it is a requirement of the dramatic form as well as of the content of this play. Edgar's speech, as I hope to show, 'rounds off' the play by harking back to the first scene, and is perhaps the only possible summing-up of the play.

Those last words are peculiarly bare. They carry no images at all, no poetic ambiguity, no phonetic music — nothing at all to inspire the usual kind of critical eloquence. Perhaps that is one reason why they have not received much attention.<sup>9</sup> Even when they have attracted attention, they have not been found to be quite

satisfactory. Some of the comments on those words, from very respectable and percipient critics, have been of an uncertain kind. L. C. Knights, for example, says —

The play ends with those curiously hesitant and unemphatic lines of Edgar's — ... It is almost a confession of inadequacy of words, as though words no longer matter.<sup>10</sup>

'Unemphatic' these lines may be, but are they 'hesitant'? Maynard Mack seems to concede that these lines may possibly sum up the play, but he is, — may I be permitted to say? — 'hesitant'. He says —

(Edgar's) last speech in the play, if we follow the Folio text in giving the closing lines to Edgar rather than to Albany, is just possibly eloquent of what we are to think has taken place in him. The words ring no longer with high conviction; their form has little of the sententiousness that has characterised him earlier; and if in a sense they still sum up the play, it is because they carry a minimum of commitment.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Mack's language is interesting. 'If we follow the Folio text', 'just possibly', 'if in a sense they still sum up the play' — a statement with such hedges around seems determined to 'carry a minimum of commitment' from the critic himself. And Mack's last sentence is quite wrong. These lines do not sum up the play by avoiding commitment; they carry a great commitment: to speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

In the context of the play that bare line—'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say'—comes charged with tragic wisdom, wisdom that carries the burden of a vast world in travail, to use Bradley's memorable phrase. This wisdom is unconsoling, unafraid,—but not arrogant, not strident, not pompous. The tone and rhythm of these lines are unemphatic, quiet. But, these words carry a commitment. It is at once a very simple and a very complex utterance, if we keep the whole play, especially the first scene of the play, in mind.

The New Variorum Edition of *King Lear* has preserved for us an explanation of Edgar's speech offered by Dr Alex Schmidt. According to this, the substance of what Edgar says is that for the moment he is incapable of saying what he ought to say. I understand this to mean that Edgar is so overwhelmed by grief that he finds himself almost inarticulate.



This notion of good people being made dumb by excess of genuine and powerful feeling is found elsewhere too. In Bradley's portrait of Cordelia we come across an incapability of speech similar to what Schmidt found in Edgar's last speech. About Cordelia in the first scene, Bradley said—

Tender emotion, and especially a tender love for the person to whom she has to speak, makes her dumb.<sup>12</sup>

Bradley, of course, did notice that Cordelia is not quite dumb, not always tongue-tied. A little later, Bradley quoted her speech of nine and a half lines (I. i. 95-104) in reply to Lear's threat—'Mend your speech a little, / Lest you mar your fortunes'. Bradley quoted that speech in full, and he was shocked beyond measure. He exclaimed—

What words for the ear of an old father, unreasonable, despotic, but fondly loving...!<sup>13</sup>

There surely never was a more unhappy speech, Bradley said, and he himself was extremely unhappy over it.

Thus Bradley's Cordelia was not only occasionally dumb, she was also guilty of a wrong kind of speech—wrong in tone, and wrong in content. Bradley thought of other heroines of Shakespeare who could have

made the unreasonable old king feel that he was fondly loved without a loss of self-respect on their part.<sup>14</sup>

Cordelia cannot, according to Bradley, because she is Cordelia. This incompatibility of character with the particular circumstance in which it is placed, constituted—as we all know, an essential ingredient of the tragic situation for Bradley. Cordelia is so created that she cannot say what she ought to say. That is her tragedy.

But at the end of the play, Edgar is saying that we should not say what we ought to say. Something must be wrong.

### III

Another version of this kind of dumbness of good people may be derived from the judgement that language is in any case inadequate

for expression of genuine and powerful feelings or of 'ultimate' values. L. C. Knights's comment which we have already quoted suggested that Edgar's last speech is 'almost a confession of inadequacy of words, as though words no longer matter'. Winnifred Nowotny, in her illuminating essay on the style of *King Lear* remarked—

The play is deeply concerned with the inadequacy of language to do justice to feeling or to afford any handhold against abysses of iniquity and suffering.<sup>14</sup>

Shelden Zitner's comments on the last speech of Edgar, containing much insight and valuable judgements, also contain this—

With a paradox that the passage shares with much else in the play, language as literature, therefore language at the top of its bent, declares itself inadequate for the task it has just performed.<sup>15</sup>

The view that language may be inadequate for expression of certain powerful feelings is to be respected. To challenge the general validity of that judgement is not my purpose. But I do not see the relevance of that judgement to these last lines of *King Lear*. After all, Edgar is not saying that we cannot say what we feel. He is saying, 'We *must*...speak what we feel.' That is an injunction. How can we speak what we feel, if what we feel can never be spoken? The other part of the sentence, 'not what we ought to say', does not mean that we should not say anything, but that we should not say what we ought to say. That is a paradox. It is a pity that Zitner, who is percipient of much that usually escape notice, and mentions a large 'paradox', does not deign to consider the paradox here.

#### IV

The 'ought' in that phrase 'what we ought to say' does not here mean 'ought'. How to explain that 'ought'? And, what has 'the weight of the sad time' got to do with this?

An explicit opposition between 'what we feel' and 'what we ought to say' is the axis of this paradox. Obviously, what 'we ought to say' is not 'what we feel' here,—and, therefore, not true, not morally right, and therefore, we really ought not to say 'what we ought to say'. This is a very difficult position.

There are types of people,— they should be familiar to us —, who never experience any difficulty in such matters. They are never aware of any possibility of any contradiction between what we feel and what we ought to say. There is the glib self-righteous man who claims that he *always* speaks what he feels. Of such stuff are made the Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* and the Apemantus in *Timon of Athens* — railing knaves. There is also the character portrayed by the angry Duke of Cornwall in *King Lear*—

This is some fellow,  
Who, having been prais'd for bluntness, doth affect  
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb  
Quite from his nature : he cannot flatter, he,  
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth :  
And they will take it, so ; if not, he's plain. (II. ii. 96-101)<sup>17</sup>

Hardly a model of virtue !

At the other pole there is the conformist who is never worried by any feeling at all,—and therefore, is quite unaware of any possibility of any difficulty in saying what he feels. He *always* says what he ought to say.

Edgar's speech is not for such people. In the meaning of that speech, what we 'ought to say' is governed by rules of decorum, determined by socially established modes and manners, sanctioned by tradition, culture, custom and, not the least, convention. In a happy state of society, decorum is inalienable from true speech ; decorum and morality and true feeling exist in a stable unity in such a society. In such a society, if at any time what we 'feel' be opposed to what we 'ought to say', then we should not say what we feel, but re-examine our feelings and rectify them. Our feelings may not be always right, they may often be wrong and may need rectification. That is the purpose of education and culture and morality,—training of our feelings, disciplining of our sensibilities, inhibition of anti-social impulses, correction of manners. If we are always to speak what we feel, regardless of time, place, person and occasion, regardless too of our own limitations of ignorance and incompetence, social life would become impossible.

But there may be a 'sad time', when a society is in crisis. Then the unity of decorum and morality breaks down. What we 'ought to say' falls apart from what we may rightly feel, becomes antagonis-

tic to it. Then we must speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. To put it in another way, what we then ought to say is not what the established society thought we 'ought to say', but only what we truly feel.

In such a crisis not only is the unity of decorum and morality broken, but morality itself is split into two antagonistic codes. In a sense, Truth and Beauty fall apart. And, a man has to choose in this historic dilemma.

In the first scene of the play Lear put the question to Cordelia — 'So young, and so untender?' 'So young, my lord, and true', she replied. She did not deny that she was being 'untender'.<sup>18</sup> But she found herself in a crisis where it was no longer possible to be 'true' and 'tender' at the same time. Truth and tenderness had fallen apart.

Let us remind ourselves that tenderness is a virtue. Lack of tenderness is not a virtue, it is a grave defect. But our virtues and vices are also matters of social relationship. No man can be virtuous all by himself. Virtue and vice are meaningful terms only in a society. The absolutely isolated individual has neither virtue nor vice. As Arthur Sewall observed in course of a very cogent discussion on the character of Cordelia, — '... morally, we are members of each other.'<sup>19</sup> Danby had used the same phrase earlier, and had also observed that the 'central truth' of *King Lear* is that 'the good man needs a community of goodness'.<sup>20</sup>

In that first scene of the play, Lear himself and Goneril and Regan had made it impossible for Cordelia to be both tender and true. She made her choice—she would be true, jettisoning tenderness which is so much a part of her self.

Bradley felt very unhappy about this truth of Cordelia. He said—

'But truth is not the only good in the world, nor is the obligation to tell truth the only obligation. The matter here was to keep it inviolate, but also to preserve a father.'<sup>21</sup>

Bradley was, of course, quite right,—truth is not the only good in the world, and the obligation to tell truth is not the only obligation. The obligation of decorum, and the obligation of tenderness, are also there. These should not be easily dismissed as unimportant.

But Bradley did not seem to know the awful dilemma of the tragic situation where a man has to choose to be either true or tender and cannot be both, a situation where truth can only be harsh, unpleasant, painful, and involves a loss, a sacrifice of a part of one's own self.

## V

The last four lines of the play thus hark back to Cordelia's moral dilemma in the first scene. However, the moral dilemma in the first scene was not only Cordelia's dilemma. It was also a dilemma for Kent. Robert Heilman has used the phrase 're-iteration plus variation' to point to an important feature of the dramatic technique of this play.<sup>22</sup> Most of the important themes or questions of the play, and some of the stage-actions too, are presented at least twice with some variation between the several instances, the variation itself serving the purpose of emphatic pointing. Cordelia's dilemma and the validity of her choice are sharply underlined, as it were, by Kent a few lines later—

When Lear is mad. ... Be Kent unmannerly,  
When majesty falls to folly. ... To plainness honour's bound  
(I. i. 145-6, 148-9)

And he *is* unmannerly. Consider his two speeches at this point. He begins in a deeply respectful, formal, courteous manner. He is threatened by Lear, and at once sharply changes into plain, blunt, even rude address :

*Kent.* Royal Lear,  
Whom I have ever honour'd as my King,  
Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,  
As my great patron thought on in my prayers,—  
*Lear.* The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.  
*Kent.* Let it fall rather, though the fork invade  
The region of my heart ; be Kent unmannerly,  
When Lear is mad. What would'st thou do, old man ?  
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak  
When power to flattery bows ? To plainness honour's bound  
When majesty falls to folly. .... (139-49)

Angus McIntosh, in his short note on the first scene of the play, pointed out in a footnote—

To an audience of the time, Kent's use of *thou* here—(McIntosh counted seventeen instances in the thirty-five lines from 146 to 180)—must in itself have conveyed a spine-chilling effect of *lèse-majesté*.<sup>23</sup>

The change from 'Royal Lear' 'my King' to 'thou, old man'—this 'thou'-ing the king in the open court, would be not only a breach of decorum, but even a declaration of rebellion. A half-century after the writing of *King Lear*, in 1657, the militant Anabaptist preacher Venner was interrogated by Oliver Cromwell himself. Venner and his companions refused to address Cromwell as 'you', that form of address being in their view an ungodly token of unchristian inequality among men. Bishop Thomas Edwards recorded his shocked feelings over this episode: 'they would not put off hats to him, thou'd him at every word they spoke to him.'<sup>24</sup> A couple of years before *King Lear* was written, in November 1603, was held the famous or infamous trial of Sir Walter Raleigh on a charge of high treason. Attorney General Coke had been addressing Raleigh as 'Sir Walter' and using the 'you'-form. But there came a sudden change:

Raleigh. ... Here is no treason of mine done. If my Lord Cobham be a traitor, what is that to me?

Coke. All that he did was by thy instigation, thou viper! For I thou thee, thou traitor! ...<sup>25</sup>

Kent decides to be 'plain' and he is decidedly 'unmannerly'. Cordelia is not 'unmannerly' but she chooses to be 'plain'. 'Let pride which she calls plainness marry her', says Lear, and although Cordelia never used the word 'plainness' or 'plain' for herself, the term is applicable to her nine-a-half-line speech beginning with 'Good my Lord,...'(95ff.) She does not say what she 'ought to say'. Goneril and Regan do say what they 'ought to say'.

## VI

At this point I find that I must dwell a little longer on the first scene before I can return to my comments on the last four lines. For I must justify that last sentence of the preceding section, and, — without much hedging, state what I understand to happen in the first scene. I am aware that I am making a very rash claim — that I understand what happens in the first scene of *King Lear*. Great critics have confessed that they are perplexed by this scene — some by Lear's conduct there, some by Cordelia's conduct, and some by

the entire scene. Contemporaries like Jan Kott would say that the scene is as 'absurd' as a scene in a play by Durrenmatt.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps I am rushing in where scholars and critics have feared to tread. But how can one say anything about any line in *King Lear* without some understanding of the first scene?

Coleridge's remarks on the first scene of *King Lear* are well-known. These constitute an extraordinary amalgam of keen perceptions and some very potent misunderstandings. Among other things, Coleridge said—

Let the first scene of the play have been lost, and let it only be understood that a fond father had been duped by hypocritical professions of love and duty on the part of two daughters to disinherit the third, previously, and deservedly, more dear to him;—and all the rest of the tragedy would retain its interest undiminished, and be perfectly intelligible.<sup>27</sup>

Coming from Coleridge, this is somewhat breath-taking. Coleridge also said that the 'interest and situations' of the play are 'derived from the assumption of a gross improbability', and perhaps this was the basis for Kenneth Muir's comment: 'Coleridge complained of the gross improbability of the opening situation of the play'.<sup>28</sup> I would, however, prefer to believe that Coleridge was not exactly stating a 'complaint' of his own here but echoing an established opinion. It seems to me that, pleading for the whole play against the charge of improbability, Coleridge here was perhaps trying to put aside for the moment the rather inconvenient first scene in order to pursue his main argument. It is difficult to believe that the passage quoted above could be the considered opinion of the man who had a few lines earlier noted the 'forethought' and the 'significance' of the first four or five lines of this scene.

Yet, the passage remains. It is entirely wrong. If the first scene be replaced by a kind of prose-prologue giving this sort of a 'gist' of 'assumptions' to be made for what would then be 'the proper opening' of the play, 'all the rest of the tragedy' will suffer immensely, and, I do not think that it will be 'perfectly intelligible'.

But Coleridge's remark is even more misleading, because the 'gist' of the first scene which he offered here is quite wrong. The facts given in the first scene are not what Coleridge here asked us to assume. I must assert that Lear is *not* 'duped by hypocritical professions' on

the part of Goneril and Regan. I must further assert that the speeches of Goneril and Regan are *not* 'hypocritical' ; they make the kind of speech that Lear has demanded, they say what they 'ought to say' ; the hypocrisy that is involved in their speeches is the ordinary hypocrisy of decorous speech ; they do not try to deceive, and Lear is not deceived by them. I have to emphasise this point in view of the persistence of the notion that Lear was deceived by the protestations of Goneril and Regan, and believed them and acted upon these speeches.<sup>89</sup> A full explanation of the first scene is beyond the scope of the present article, but even for the present purpose I have to state the 'facts of the case' as I understand them. It will be noticed that I am following a method which would be associated with Bradley and his predecessors, involving an attempt to narrate the 'events before the opening of the action'<sup>90</sup> and 'glimpses behind the scenes'.<sup>91</sup> This method of interpretation involving speculations about what happened behind the scene or beyond the text has been condemned and ridiculed often enough. But, at this date, I do not think that I need to apologise for it. Drama is an image of human action, and charges of improbability or absurdity cannot be met except through some explanation of this kind. Moreover, *King Lear* is a play which almost demands such an explanation. Many of the actions of the play are explained later, and there are many invitations to look before and after.<sup>92</sup> The first scene, above all, requires to be explained, — the critical controversy about it being itself evidence of the need. As John Lawlor observed, 'So brief is this opening action and so tempestuous what immediately follows that it is often overlooked.'<sup>93</sup> It has been said that this is a major flaw of the play 'considered as a play. I submit that it is not a flaw but an indication that this is a very unusual kind of play calling for a specially alert attention.'<sup>94</sup>

In a broad sense the play begins *in medias res*. As Coleridge pointed out, in the first four or five lines of the play Kent and Gloucester talk about the division of the kingdom as practically an accomplished fact. We gather that a formal announcement is all that remains to be done. What Coleridge did not consider necessary to point out but later commentators have noted<sup>95</sup>, is the relaxed cheerful tone of the conversation between Kent and Gloucester. We are usually so put off by Gloucester's indecent gaiety that we do



not notice the quiet elegance in Kent's speech. The point is that neither of them is worried at all about the division of the kingdom. Kent's surprise that the Duke of Albany has not been given a better share than Cornwall's does not carry any anxiety. They are very satisfied about the division, happy that Cordelia will have the 'most opulent' share. They do not question Lear's wisdom. For, Lear's decision, arbitrary as it is, is not unwise.

The Law of Primogeniture held in Lear's land (—Edmund makes this explicit, in I. ii. 2-6).<sup>86</sup> But Lear 'had no issue male him to succeed'<sup>87</sup>—he had no son. He had three alternatives for determining the succession: (a) he could leave the entire kingdom to the eldest-born of the three daughters; (b) he could divide the kingdom equally among the three; or, (c) he could give the best third part to the most deserving and most beloved of the daughters. There could be other alternatives, but it is not necessary to consider them here. Shakespeare's Lear took the third course. It was Shakespeare's decision that his Lear should do so; for the sources give both the second and third alternatives, and Shakespeare had a choice.<sup>88</sup> Shakespeare's Lear also decided that Cordelia was the most deserving of the three daughters and she should be given the 'most opulent' share of the kingdom.

This was known to everybody. Not only do Kent and Gloucester talk about the division at the very opening of the action of the play, they talk about the respective shares. It should be obvious that knowing as they do about the respective shares of Albany and Cornwall, i.e. of Goneril and Regan, they also know that the best third part is being kept for Cordelia. And they are quite happy. But it is not only Kent and Gloucester who know this. Lear has told the two suitors for Cordelia's hand, the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France, that this 'best third part of his kingdom will be Cordelia's dowry—to be given 'in present dower' (I.i. 192). Bradley pointed out that Burgundy knew this.<sup>89</sup> I do not see any reason for the assumption that only Burgundy was told and the King of France was not. There is also no need to assume that this was a 'dark secret' known to only a few of the king's confidants. We should rather assume that this was known to everybody in and around Lear's court, and the daughters and the Dukes knew.

Lear's court in the opening scene in the play had been summoned to hear the public proclamation of the division of the kingdom. This was to be no more than a 'ceremony'. No one apprehended any complication over this. Lear was held in awe and his perceptions about the respective merits of the daughters appeared to be quite sound.

But there was another matter to be decided and announced in the court,—Cordelia's marriage. Lear does put this on the agenda,—to use a modern jargon :

The Princes, France and Burgundy,  
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,  
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,  
And here are to be answer'd. (I. i. 45-8)

'Here are to be answer'd'—this cannot be delayed any more, And, Cordelia's dowry will have to be announced as a part of the marriage settlement. This, I suggest, is the really urgent reason why the kingdom had to be divided. Lear could not give the best third part of his kingdom to Cordelia as her dowry without dividing the kingdom. The words 'present dower' in Lear's question to Burgundy referred to above are to be noticed.\*<sup>o</sup>

In *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir* the starting point of the action was the question of Cordelia's marriage. The king's problem there was how to persuade Cordelia to marry. Shakespeare's Lear has no such problem. His problem may be how to decide between the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy,—but Shakespeare's play, before it may reach that point, moves off in another direction, and the decision is made by Burgundy's rejection of the dowerless Cordelia and the King of France 'seizing upon' the 'unpriz'd precious maid'.

Yet, the question of Cordelia's marriage and the settlement of her dowry survives in Shakespeare's version as at least one of the major items of business of the court in the opening scene.

It is Lear himself who created another problem. It seems that he somehow felt that a public justification of his decision to give the best part of his kingdom to the youngest daughter was necessary. He makes no secret that he loves this daughter most ('Now, our joy,/Although our last and least' ; I.i.82-3). That should have

been reason enough. But Lear decided on a 'stratagem' for making a 'ceremony' out of this. This was the truly 'dark purpose' he had in his mind. No one else knew about this.

I have used the word 'stratagem'. The word occurs in the source-play. In I.i. 78 of *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*<sup>41</sup> Leir was meditating 'a sudden stratagem'; at the end of his speech he spoke of 'my policy'; and the scene ended with the 'good counsellor' Perillus observing, 'Thus fathers think their children to beguile'. I suggest that in the so-called 'love-test' Shakespeare's Lear was also employing a stratagem to beguile the two elder daughters.

The phrasing of Lear's proposal of the so-called love-test is noteworthy. In the *True Chronicle Historie* Leir said,

Resolve a doubt which much molests my mind,  
Which of you three to me would prove most kind ;  
Which loves me most, and which at my request  
Will soonest yield unto their fathers hest. (I. iii. 232-5)<sup>42</sup>

Shakespeare's Lear says—

Tell me, my daughters,

... ..  
Which of you *shall we say* doth love us most ? (I. i 48, 51)

I emphasise the phrase 'shall we say'. Bernard McElroy has noted the reiteration of the words 'say' and 'speak' in the first scene, and has rightly observed that 'the emphasis of the entire contest is not upon loving but upon *saying*.'<sup>43</sup> Sheldon Zitner has noticed that Lear's 'own words in the first scene are speaking that purposes not.'<sup>44</sup> I suspect the phrase 'shall we say'. Ordinarily, it is a mere question-tag. Neither Lear's audience nor Shakespeare's audience would give any attention to it. But it may be an equivocal. If we stress the word 'say', the meaning becomes very different. Lear's question, then, is not about the daughters' love but about what Lear himself shall say. Shakespeare's Lear is a great believer in what modern linguists, following J. L. Austin, call 'illocutionary speech-acts'. He believes that he can make things happen by saying that they have happened, he can bring anything into existence and destroy anything by an utterance. In the question put to his daughters he is, according to my interpretation, declaring his intention to perform an

illocutionary speech-act. What the daughters may have to say is not material at all. What does matter is what Lear shall say.

I have said that Lear's audience would not notice the equivocal. But that makes no difference, because they know Lear, they know that all the decisions about the division of the kingdom have been taken, and the daughters' speeches will not make him change his mind.

We should notice that the last line of Lear's speech putting the question (I. i. 54) is a short line. I think there should be a distinct pause on the stage at this point. This is a moment of big surprise for all in the court. I think also that for a moment, Goneril, invited to speak first, is bewildered. Then she gathers her wits together, and delivers the speech in reply. Stanley Cavell has suggested that Goneril's speech, as well as Regan's, should be spoken to the court.<sup>45</sup> The speech is a series of end-stopped lines, stilted and stereotyped hyperboles — exactly the kind of speech called for by Lear. I think also that on the stage Lear should not pay the slightest attention to what Goneril is saying. He should be enjoying the joke, but he should be contemptuously inattentive. At the end of the speech Lear makes no comments on the speech, — the *Chronicle Historie* Lear does,—but proceeds to award the pre-determined share of the kingdom.

If this were a contest of any kind, whether a love-contest or an elocution-contest, it were unfair throughout. Not only were the results of the contest pre-determined, 'fixed' as we say nowadays, but even the pretence was not kept up. How did Lear know that Goneril's was not the best speech? He did not wait to hear the speeches of Regan and Cordelia. How can you judge on the respective merits of contestants before the end of the performances?

The opening words of Regan's speech are interesting :

I am made of that self metal as my sister,  
And prize me at her worth. (I. i. 69-70)

I read between these lines something like this : 'Well, I know that you have already decided to give me a part of the kingdom which is exactly equal to the one given to Goneril. You want me to accept that and declare that is what I deserve. That is what I am

doing. For, I also know that your decision will not be altered in the slightest by anything that I may say.' If, nevertheless, she proceeds to make even bigger hyperboles than the ones made by Goneril, that only shows her nature — why should not she try to put up a better performance than Goneril's in this meaningless game of words? Once again, Lear does not wait, he makes the award, thus blatantly keeping the best part of the kingdom for the youngest daughter who has not yet made her speech. The question was not, 'Which of the daughters loved Lear most'. The question was, 'Who, shall Lear say, loved him most?' It was a stratagem, not a contest, at all.

Lear was being too clever. And, therefore, foolish. For, he assumed that Cordelia would be an accomplice in this quibbling game of words, which, in the name and in the form of a 'ceremony', was a mockery of true ceremony.

That being the case, Cordelia's reply to Lear's question is entirely right. Gloucester in his feeble indecencies in the dialogue with Kent had already raised the suspicion that the society of Lear's kingdom is in a state of degeneration. Lear, in his canny but frivolous play with ceremony and his show of 'some form of justice' instead of justice,<sup>46</sup> confirm the suspicion. The older generation, inspite of their obvious positive qualities, can no longer be obeyed without untruth and hypocrisy. Cordelia raises the first voice of protest. Her reply is not a withdrawal, but a positive action.<sup>47</sup> I assert that Cordelia is faultless in her conduct.<sup>48</sup> She chooses to be 'untender', because that is the only way she could be 'true'. And Kent approves her speech, not only the content of the speech, but the manner too —

The Gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,  
That justly think'st and hast most rightly said. (I. i. 182-3)

Even her worst enemies in the play, Goneril and Regan, consider that Lear cast her off with 'poor judgement', and can charge her with only disobedience ('you have obedience scanted'). Her disobedience is a fact. But it was a necessary disobedience. She had to disobey her father in order to speak 'not what she ought to say' but what she felt. Her 'Nothing' and her explanation of that 'Nothing' appeared to Lear as intolerable fault, and showed most ugly in her. Lear would later recognise that it was no fault in Cordelia. But there

would be an intermediate stage when he would see this as a 'most small fault' :

O most small fault,  
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show !  
Which, like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature  
From the fix'd place,... (I. iv. 275-8)

It was not even a 'small fault'. But, without doubt, there was a loss, a want of tenderness, which would be unnoticed and tolerable in others but did show ugly in Cordelia because she was naturally tender. And, it was not only Lear's 'frame of nature' which was 'wrenched from the fixed place' by Cordelia's act, the act involved a prior 'wrenching' in Cordelia.

The harshness in Cordelia's reply would appear to be ugly. It does so appear to most of the commentators. But the harshness is the harshness often apparent in the conduct of heroes and martyrs and revolutionaries. One recalls Bertolt Brecht's words in his famous poem *An Die Nachgeborenen* ('To Posterity') :

And yet we know well :  
Even hatred of vileness  
Distorts a man's features.  
Even anger at injustice  
Makes hoarse his voice. Ah, we  
Who desired to prepare the soil for kindness  
Could not ourselves be kind.<sup>49</sup>

## VII

We may now return to the last four lines of the play. 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say' cannot be a rule of conduct for all times. It is a 'sad time' when we have to make that choice.

In our country some of the Upanishads preserve a pledge and a prayer. <sup>50</sup> The pledge is—

.ṛtam vadisyāmi, satyam vadisyāmi

This may be translated as—'I shall speak what is proper, I shall say what is true.' The word *ṛta* had various meanings and associated implications. Sometimes it meant 'truth' and would be synonymous with *Satya*. But the word often meant 'the cosmic order' and 'universal law of appropriate conduct'. In the *Rgveda* a famous *sukta* opened with :

satyenottabhitā bhumih suryenottabhitā dyouh  
ṛtenādityāsthiṣṭanti divi somo adhisritah<sup>51</sup>

which can be translated as—

The land is held up by truth (*satyena*), the heaven above is held up by the sun, it is by *rta* that the shining ones stay in the sky pervaded by *soma*.

*Rta* then would correspond to 'Degree' in Ulysses' speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, I. iii. and to 'speak *ṛtam*' would be to speak in correct accordance with appropriate order and decorum.

This *ṛtam* is true speech which is also beautiful speech. The prayer of the Upanishads which I have referred to is—

vāṅ me manasi pratisthitā mano me vāci pratisthitam

'Let my speech be situate in my mind, let my mind be situate in my speech'. This is a prayer for complete concord between the word of the mouth and the feeling in the heart. Such concord is not obtained easily or always. That is why one prays for it.

We ought to recall Seneca too. In one of his Moral Epistles, he wrote to Lucilius ,

You have been complaining that my letters to you are rather carelessly written. Now who talks carefully unless he also desires to talk affectedly ? (*Quis enim accurate loquitur nisi qui vult putide loqui ?*) ...I prefer, however, that our conversation on matters so important should not be meagre and dry (*jejuna et arida*) ; for even philosophy does not renounce the company of ingenuity. One should not, however, bestow very much attention upon mere words. Let this be the kernel of my idea : let us say what we feel, and feel what we say (*quod sentimus loquamur, quod loquimur sentiamus*) ; let speech be in concord with life (*concordat sermo cum vita*).<sup>52</sup>

'Quod sentimus loquamur, quod loquimur sentiamus'. The Shakespearean line does not give us the other part of the chiasmus of Seneca, it leaves out 'let us feel what we say'. For, the emphasis in the play is on the 'sad time'. When the concord between truth and beauty becomes impossible, then it is a 'sad time'. That word 'sad', we may remind ourselves, meant not only 'full of sorrow' but also 'serious' or 'solemn' — close to the meaning of the Greek word *spoudaios*. Not all time is 'sad time' ; as the prophet in the Old Testament said, 'to every thing there is a season and a

time to every purpose under the heaven ; ... a time to keep, and a time to cast away ; ... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.'<sup>58</sup>

But when it is a 'sad time', its weight has to be obeyed, and at such times we must 'speak what we feel, not what we ought to say'. The final speech of this play, therefore, cannot be according to the usual rules of decorum. Edgar, as the spokesman of the new generation that has come to assume responsibility, can at this point only offer a homage to the older generation which has passed away. The first few scenes of the play did present a conflict of generations. But the criticism of and the opposition to the older generation came from two opposite camps within the younger generation. In the second scene of the First Act, Edmund appears as the most devastating critic of the older generation and all their customs and conventions. But it was Cordelia who in the first scene had protested against the hypocrisy of established manners and refused to obey. It is fitting that at the end of the play the older generation should be given its due. Even now Edgar does not use the customary language of obituaries. He states what are facts — 'the oldest hath borne most'. The younger generation shall not see so much, because such a 'sad time' shall not recur soon. And the older generation showed its capacity for endurance, for living 'so long'. — this long endurance making the extraordinary experiences possible. The younger generation is awed by the capacity to endure such experience, the capacity to suffer such huge sorrows. As Heilman commented, —

After so much rage, so many reversals, so much agony, so much searching for truth, it is fitting for Edgar to close by saying, 'We that are young/ Shall never see so much...' An epoch has ended ; the next stage in the cycle will be quieter and less searching.<sup>59</sup>

The knowledge acquired through the sufferings of the older generation, however, can become a part of the common human heritage. Human consciousness has extended its boundaries, and the succeeding generations can know a little more than those who suffered so much, saw so much and lived so long.

Bleak, flat monosyllables — that is how the style of these closing lines strike many commentators. It is not always noticed how these plain words gather a peculiar strength from the context of the whole play which precedes them. The lexical structure of



these lines is made up of the words — 'weight', 'sad time', 'obey', 'speak', 'feel', 'ought to', 'say', 'old', 'young', 'borne', 'see', 'live', 'so much' 'so long'. The words 'speak' and 'say' obviously recall the first scene. The word 'see' relates to the large structure of images, metaphors, and actions involving eyesight — what Heilman called the 'sight-pattern' of image and symbol in the play — with the blinding of Gloucester as its centrepiece. The verb 'feel' is also a major verb in the play. It occurs in Lear's 'Poor naked wretches' speech,— 'Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel' (III. iv. 34); and in Gloucester's prayer, — 'the superfluous and lust-dieted man, / ... that will not see/Because he dose not feel, feel your power quickly ;' (IV. i, 67-9); there are other instances of this insistence on 'feeling' in the play. The explicit distinction made between 'old' and 'young' in Edgar's speech is unmistakably connected with the theme of 'conflict of generations', and Edgar's speech is a speech of reconciliation between the two generations—a reconciliation between the positive good in the old and the positive good in the young.

Edgar's words, therefore, do sum up the play. But the weight of these words can be felt only through a sensitive reading of the whole play, a kind of 'reading and re-reading' which was suggested by Leo Spitzer.<sup>55</sup>

#### NOTES & REFERENCES

- 1 Maynard Mack observed : 'In a number of ways, our own century seems better qualified to communicate and respond to the full range of experience in *King Lear* than any previous time, save possibly Shakespeare's own.' — Maynard Mack, *King Lear in Our Time*, Univ of California Press, 1965, pbk edn 1972, p 25.
- 2 Edwin Muir, 'Politics of *King Lear*', *Essays on Literature and Society*, Hogarth Press, 1949, p 33.
- 3 John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, Faber, 1949, pbk edn 1961, p 52.
- 4 Bernard McElroy, *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies*, Princeton Univ Press, 1973, p 146.
- 5 Danby, op. cit. *passim*.
- 6 Robert B Heilman, *This Great Stage*, Baton Rouge, 1948, rpt Univ of Washington Press, 1963, p 164.

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- 7 There are some exceptions which will be noticed in course of this essay, but Sheldon Zitner's essay '*King Lear* and Its Language' in Rosalie Colie & F. T. Flahiff (eds.), *Some Facets of King Lear: Essays in Prismatic Criticism*, Univ of Toronto, 1974, pp 3-22 should be mentioned at once.
- 8 Zitner, op. cit, p 4: "The passage itself is a conscious defiance of conventions. ... All the theatrical 'oughts' are rejected ... in favour of speaking what one feels. ... It suggests that the demands of form and decorum lead to untruths. ..."
- 9 A recent example of inattention is provided by Joseph H. Summers: "... Edgar (if we accept the Folio reading) concludes the play. We may, if we wish, assume that he will accede to Albany's request—that he is the new king, but he does not clearly state this decision. He *only remarks* that at this moment noble characters *no longer speak according to their social and political, or even moral responsibilities, ...*" —'Look there, look there! The Ending of *King Lear*', *English Renaissance Studies Presented to Dame Helen Gardner*, ed. John Carey, Oxford Univ Press, 1980, p 92-3. Emphases added.
- 10 L. C. Knights, *Explorations* 3, Chatto & Windus, 1976, p 113.
- 11 Maynard Mack, op. cit. p 63.
- 12 A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Macmillan & Co, 2nd Edn. 1905, rpt 1956, p 318.
- 13 Ibid, p 320.
- 14 Ibid, p 318.
- 15 Winnifred Nowottny, 'Some Aspects of the Style of *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Survey* 13, 1960, p 52.
- 16 Zitner, op. cit, p 4.
- 17 The text, here and elsewhere in this essay, is from Kenneth Muir's New Arden edition of the play.
- 18 It is interesting to recall how Bradley insisted on her 'tender emotion' and 'tender love'.
- 19 Arthur Sewall, *Character and Society in Shakespeare*, Oxford Univ Press, 1951, p 113.
- 20 Danby, op. cit, p 52, 209.
- 21 Bradley, op. cit, p 320-1.
- 22 Heilman, op. cit, *passim*.
- 23 Angus McIntosh, 'King Lear, Act I, Scene 1, A Stylistic Note', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 14, No. 53, 1963, p 56.
- 24 H. N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed, Christopher Hill, Cresset Press, 1961, p 42 ff.
- 25 Robert Lacey, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973, p 299.

- 26 Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 1961, Methuen pbk edn 1967, p 103.
- 27 The quotation is from the footnote in Furness, New Variorum edition of *King Lear*. The passage can be seen in many other books, including Raysor, ed. *Coleridge's Shakespeare Criticism*. Vol. I, p 55. According to Ruth Nevo, 'Coleridge's conclusion...fathered a host of later vulgarizations of the tragic predicament'—Ruth Nevo, *Tragic Form in Shakespeare*, Princeton Univ Press, 1972, pp 262-3.
- 28 Kenneth Muir, Introduction, *King Lear*, New Arden edn, Methuen 1952, rpt 1965, p lxiii.
- 29 The persistence of the notion can be seen in : Bradley, op. cit. p 281—'Lear's 'complete blindness to the hypocrisy which is patent to us at a glance'; Jan Kott, op. cit, p 102—Lear 'does not see or understand anything : Regan's and Goneril's hypocrisy is all too evident. Regarded as a person, a character, Lear is ridiculous, naive and stupid'; Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, Methuen, 1972, p 178—'Although he invited them himself, Lear takes Goneril's and Regan's hypocritical protestations of love for him as genuine...'; R. B. Heilman, op. cit, p 160, does not quite say that Lear is deceived, but he is of the view that Lear's 'demand for avowals of affection' was seriously introduced (Coleridge thought it was 'a silly trick') and, 'However the demand may have come up the fact is that Lear does act on it seriously', and 'our business is to see the symbolic significance of his action'. (Heilman's quest of 'symbolic significance' here is symptomatic of a powerful trend of contemporary criticism, which delights in finding symbolic significance or 'deep psychological complexities' in conduct or speech which is assumed to be improbable or incredible or absurd.) For the contrary view, see especially Ruth Nevo, op. cit, pp 261-6; Bernard McElroy, op. cit, pp 165-6; Zitner, op. cit, pp 7-8.
- 30 The phrase 'Events before the opening of the action' is the heading for one of Bradley's Notes on *Hamlet*, op. cit, p 401.
- 31 Ruth Nevo used the phrase 'glimpses behind the scenes which disclose the realities of state politics', op. cit, p 263.
- 32 To take a few examples : Lear's fury in the first scene is explained by Lear himself in I. iv—

O small fault,  
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show !  
Which, like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature  
From the fix'd place, ... (275-8)

Kent's reckless and violent anger against Oswald in II. ii is explained by Kent himself in II. iv—

And meeting here the other messenger,  
Whose welcome, I perceiv'd, had poison'd mine,  
Being the very fellow which of late

Display'd so saucily against your Highness,  
 Having more man than wit about me, drew : (38-42)

The confession of loss of self-control explains his conduct which at the time of the event is puzzling.

McElroy, op. cit, p 164, 166-7, 171, points to the 'use of a specialized dramaturgy in which psychic antecedents of action are withheld until after the action has been performed' and notes that 'it is only after the irrevocable action has been consummated that we begin to get essential information' about Lear or about Cordelia.

- 33 John Lawlor, *The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*, Chatto & Windus, 1960, p 154.
- 34 In Bradley's view this is one of the faults of *King Lear* considered as a stage-play : 'The first scene is not absurd, though it must be pronounced dramatically faulty in so far as it discloses the true position of affairs only to an attention more alert than can be expected in a theatrical audience or has been found in many critics of the play.'—op. cit, p 251. *King Lear* of course demands a special kind of attention. But I would respectfully submit that the kind of attention demanded by most of the other plays of Shakespeare is not very different.
- 35 Alfred Harbage, Introduction to the 1958 Penguin Edn of *King Lear*, included in Alfred Harbage (ed), *Shakespeare, The Tragedies*, Prentice-Hall Inc, NJ, 1964, pp 113-22—'the tone is casual, jocular, polite'; Maynard Mack, op. cit, p 93—'The atmosphere of the first episode in the scene, as many a commentator has remarked, is casual, urbane, even relaxed'; Ruth Nevo, op. cit, p 263—'(The) conversation between Kent and Gloucester, which reveals, be it noted, no particular dismay on their part, regarding the proposed division, ...'
- 36 This and much else of what follows were noted by Ruth Nevo, op. cit, p 262.
- 37 Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II. x. 27; see Geoffrey Bullough (ed), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. VII, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, p 332; care is taken to mention this obvious point in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (see Bullough, p 311), Holinshed (ibid, p 317), and in *The Mirror for Magistrates* ('Because he had no sonne t'enjoye his lande', ibid, p 324).
- 38 In *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, Skalliger, the 'bad counsellor', advises unequal division according to respective merits of the daughters, but Leir firmly rejects this—'No more, nor lesse, but even all alike'. Of the earlier sources, Geoffrey's *Historia* suggested unequal division and the contest was 'to make Tryal who was the worthiest of the best part of his kingdom'; Holinshed suggested that the 'trial of love' was to help Lear 'to understand the affections of his daughters towards him, and preferre hir whome he best loved, to the succession over the kingdome': according to

one of Kenneth Muir's footnotes to his Introduction to the New Arden Edition of the play (1952 edn, p xxxvi), 'Only two accessible sources suggest that there was to be an unequal division, the best share going to Cordelia'; but it will be seen that Holinshed does not suggest an equal division. *The Mirror for Magistrates* is somewhat cryptic—'He thought to give, where favoure most he fand',—but an unequal division seems to be implied. Spenser is explicit—'his realme he equally decreed/To have divided.'

The quotations from the texts above are from Bullough, *op. cit.*

- 39 Bradley, *op. cit.*, p 249: 'Cordelia's share, which is her dowry, is perfectly well-known to Burgundy, if not to France (11. 197,245). Why not to France ?
- 40 The words 'present dowry' occur in *Leir*, 440; see Bullough, *op. cit.* p 348.
- 41 See Bullough, *op. cit.*, p 339.
- 42 *Ibid*, p 343.
- 43 McElroy, *op. cit.*, p 165, 'Love has very little to do with the goings on in the play at this early stage.' Ruth Nevo, *op. cit.*, p 259, says, 'Love has only obliquely to do with the case.'
- 44 Zitner, *op. cit.*, p 8.
- 45 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*'—Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge Univ Press, 1976, p 292.
- 46 The phrase is used by the Duke of Cornwall before the blinding of Gloucester—II, vii. 25. The distinction between 'justice' and 'some form of justice' is unmistakable.
- 47 Robert Hellman, agreeing with R. P. Warren in this, found Cordelia guilty of 'withdrawal from action', guilty of 'non-jurancy'. See Heilman, *op. cit.*, pp 35-6.
- 48 Not many would agree with this view. Starting with Coleridge, most of the commentators detect in Cordelia a touch of pride, or a grain of self-righteousness, or a coldness, or a sullen and resentful over-reaction to the falsehood in the speeches of her sisters. Of the few who hold her to be faultless, Harbage, Danby, and Dover Wilson (Cambridge New Shakespeare edn of the play, Intro, p xxv, 'In Cordelia there is nowhere any fault') should be mentioned. I do not accept Danby's thesis of the play being a Christian play with Cordelia as the Christ-figure. I would rather agree with Arthur Sewall, *op. cit.* pp 60 ff, especially with the comment: 'this is the crux of the matter—whatever she did, she would have had to ask forgiveness.' Ruth Nevo, *op. cit.*, pp 258-267, rightly objecting to the usual cataloguing of Lear's sins, and the Bildadism 'so prevalent in the criticism of *King Lear*', stresses Cordelia's faults: 'cold rationality', 'Is not her truth—her "Nothing"—too much less than the truth?', and observes; 'The more

culpable Lear is made to appear the more Christ-like Cordelia becomes, while the exculpation of Lear involves the incrimination of Cordelia'. S. L. Goldberg, *An Essay on King Lear*, Cambridge Univ Press, 1974, after pointing out that Cordelia is trapped in a dilemma' (p 19), would still say, 'Coleridge was essentially right in his account of Cordelia's action (in the first scene)' (p 23) and would stress 'an unacknowledged weakness in herself—a need to feel and appear more righteous than her sisters' (p 22).

In this connection, it is of some interest to recall that Goethe rejected the idea that Antigone in Sophocles' *Antigone* is in any sense wrong, while Hegel, whose view of tragedy influenced Bradley so much and continues to influence many others, held both Creon and Antigone partly right and partly wrong. Ivor Morris, *Shakespeare's God*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1972, pp 216-7, refers to these two views.

The Hegelian view seems to fit rather neatly with the neo-Aristotelian 'hamartia-hunting' indulged in by most commentators on tragedy and ridiculed by A. P. Rossiter, *Angel With Horns*. Longmans, 1961, Ch 13, esp. p 263n.

- 49 The English translation of the passage from Brecht's poem is by Michael Hamburger. The German text and the translation can be seen in Michael Hamburger (Tr & Ed), *German Poetry*, 1910-1975, Carcanet New Press, Manchester, 1977, pp 148, 149.
- 50 The pledge and the prayer are in the opening invocation and also in the final benediction in the *Aitareya Upanishad*. The pledge is also found in the opening invocation in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Max Muller translated the Taittiriya pledge as— 'I shall proclaim the right. I shall proclaim the true'; Max Muller, *Upanishads*, Part II, Sacred Books of the East, Oxford, 1884, p 45. Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upanishads*, Vol. III, Harper & Bros, New York, 1956, p 17, translated the Aitareya passages as —'I shall think of the right; I shall speak the right' and 'May my speech be fixed in my mind, may my mind be fixed in my speech.' There is a whole body of literature on the various meanings of *rta*. The Sankaracharya school of commentators, generally followed by Swami Nikhilananda and other scholars of the Ramakrishna Mission, distinguish between *rta* and *satya* as between two kinds of truth,—*rta* being the truth of thought, the truth of the mind, the inner truth; and *satya* being the truth of the word, the truth of correct speech. One may recall Kent's words about Cordelia in I. i. 183: 'That justly think'st and hast most rightly said!' 'Just-thinking' may be *rta*, and 'right-saying' may be *satya*. But *rta* may equally be 'right-saying' and *satya* 'just-thinking'. In one of the ranges of its multiple meanings *rta* seems to be close to Greek *orthos*, Latin *rectus*, German *recht*, and English 'right'. Max Muller suggested that *rta* could mean Latin *ratus*, something 'fixed and unalterable',—Kaegi & Arrowsmith, *The Rigveda*, New Delhi, 1975, p 126 n92.

- 51 *Rg-Veda*, X, 85, 1.
- 52 The English translation as well as the Latin phrases are taken from Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*. II, Epistle LXXV, Tr. R. M. Gummere, (Loeb's Classica), Wm Heinemann, 1962, pp 136-9. I have, however, changed Gummere's 'cleverness' to 'ingenuity' and his 'harmonize' to 'be in concord with'.
- 53 *Ecclesiastes*, iii. 1-7.
- 54 Heilman, op. cit, p. 63.
- 55 Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History*, Princeton Univ Press, New Jersey, 1948, passim, and esp. p 27.

## SUBJECT-MATTER IN ART

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COMING to an analysis of the process of artistic creation, we find that almost every work of Art has something which is generally regarded as its theme or subject-matter. A poem written on some daffodils makes the flowers its starting point to which reference may be made as something outside the poem itself and yet connected with it by virtue of its being the subject-matter. Similarly, if the painter embodies the idea of virtue on a piece of canvas, we say that it is virtue which is his theme or subject-matter. Our concern is not with this subject-matter so much as with the artist's treatment of it. It is not at all easy to show the transformation of the theme where it comes from the mind of the artist himself. Let us, therefore, take a few examples where the artist starts from a definite subject-matter outside his own creation. Our endeavour will be to see how the theme has been transformed in the finished product of Art and the result of such transformation.

To start, then, with a poem where the subject lies in the world of objective reality : *To the Skylark* by Wordsworth, for example. The poem is remarkably faithful to real life. All the characteristic qualities of the Skylark are there. The skylark soars to the clouds while its nest is on the ground. Its wings flutter with great rapidity. Sometimes it soars so high as to become almost invisible, but it stops singing as soon as it folds its wings in order to drop into its nest. Then again, the skylark's song may be heard throughout the year—it is not a bird to be seen only in some particular season. Now all these belong to the world of facts.

And yet, when we read the poem, it does not impress us as a mere description of the bird. The skylark has been transformed into something very different from its counterpart in the real world. And what is the transforming agent? Certainly the poet's personality. In the poem we have not the actual bird, but the poet's impression



about the bird, his personality playing about the skylark. And how has the reality been transformed? The skylark, it is true, soars on high. The poet tells us the same fact in a very different way. If the bird soars singing in the ethereal region, he must be an "ethereal minstrel" and a "pilgrim of the sky". But what is the cause of his soaring higher and higher up? The bird may be a despiser of the earth "where cares abound". But this idea cannot be reconciled with the fact that the bird's nest, after all, is on the ground and it constantly comes down to that. Again, whenever it comes near to its nest, it stops singing. That leads the poet to think that perhaps its nest is the dearest object to the skylark, and as it reaches its destination, its heart is so full of joy that it cannot sing. The skylark rises on the sky merely because it must have a movement of its wings. But while it soars, its heart is still with its dear home, full of the young ones. Its song, too, is meant only for keeping connections with its dear ones at the nest. Thus, the possibility of the skylark being a hater of this earth is completely rooted out. The earth is the dearest place to the skylark and the inspiration of its song too, is there.

Then again, the skylark is so much a lover of this earth that all seasons are equally favourable to its song. It has no mentality of an escapist, so that it does not, like the nightingale, seek out shady places to have a retreat. Rather, "a privacy of glorious light is thine".

Thus, finally, the skylark comes to us as a lover of this earth who can yet keep its touch with the heavens. It is, therefore, taken as a symbol of the wise man, loving his fellow beings, and at the same time living a life of high and noble thoughts: "True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home".

That it is the poet's personality which brings about the transformation of something from the world of facts into the world of poetry is proved beyond doubt when the same subject is treated by different poets. The same skylark has been treated by Shelley very differently indeed. Shelley's skylark has no touch of this earth about it. It is rather a symbol of the highest perfection. Its song, too, has no mixture of sadness.

"The Reaper" by Wordsworth provides us with another admirable illustration to our point. The occasion of the poem, noted



in the journal of Dorothy Wordsworth (Sept. 13, 1803) runs thus : "It was harvest time, and the fields were quietly—might I be allowed to say pensively?—enlivened by small companies of reapers. It is not uncommon in the more lonely parts of the Highlands to see a single person so employed. The following poem was suggested to William by a beautiful sentence in Thomas Wilkinson's *Tour in Scotland* (1787)". The sentence in Thomas Wilkinson's book is as follows: "Passed (near Loch Lomond) a female who was reaping *alone : she sang in Erse*, as she bended over her sickle ; the sweetest human voice I ever heard : her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, *long after they were heard no more*". We should notice that Wordsworth's poem is very faithful to these lines, "the last line", as the poet himself says in a note to his 1807 edn., "being taken from it verbatim".

And yet, how great is the difference between the prose narrative and the poem ! The poet does not want to disturb the lonely self-absorption of the lass. We are asked merely to stand there or pass gently, listening to the music overflowing the valley. The poet does not violate the sanctity of the scene by instituting any comparison between the song of the solitary reaper and that of other human beings. And here again, is a point of difference from his source. The Reaper has become a part of Nature herself. So, if her song is to be compared with anything, it must be with that of the birds. Hence it is that the nightingale and the cuckoo have been introduced into the poem, charged with all the romantic association of distant lands. Even the nightingale's song "in some shady haunt along Arabian sands" would not be more refreshing to the weary travellers than the song of this Highland girl. "The cuckoo-bird, breaking the silence of the seas among the farthest Hebrides", could never give us such a thrill.

Thomas Wilkinson merely mentioned that the Reaper sang in Erse. Thus, the song might well be unintelligible to the passers by ; besides, she must have been singing in a low undertone, for the place was lonely and she was bending over her sickle. Out of this slight hint Wordsworth weaves strange fancies about her. He goes on speculating about the theme of the girl's song. Is it something from a distant past, some "old, unhappy, (because her tone is melancholy) far-off things, and battles long ago", or is it one which we have to do

with in our daily life, "some natural sorrow, loss or pain that has been, and may be again" ?

But, after all, the poet understands the vainness of asking such questions. The words of the song do not matter at all. Whatever they may be, the noticeable point about her song is that it is continuous and knows no end. The poet was so profoundly moved by the music that he took it over into his heart and could recall it oftentimes with vividness.

The power of converting existing materials to the artist's own purpose finds splendid illustration in the Shakespearean dramas. Some source or other has been discovered for each one of Shakespeare's dramas excepting *Love's Labour's Lost*. Shakespeare is not an inventor of plots. And yet, how could a man with such indebtedness be regarded as an artistic genius of the highest order ? The fact is that Shakespeare's originality lies in the transformation of the materials which he had ready at hand. As Dr. Furness has aptly remarked : "Shakespeare converted the stocks and stones of old dramas and chronicles into living, breathing men and women". Let us take two examples from his dramas where he took over materials from history, for it was here that he had to encounter the greatest difficulties. The artist cannot turn history upside down. While transforming his materials he has to keep himself within certain limits. That is what Shakespeare also has done in regard to his Chronicle plays.

Our first example is *Antony and Cleopatra* where the subject has been taken over from Roman History. The historical outline of this play has been supplied by the 'Lives' of Plutarch the Greek historian ; and on the whole Shakespeare follows Plutarch very closely.

Even after all this, however, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* moves us in a manner in which Plutarch's *Life of Antony* never does. What then, is the difference ?

The difference lies in the conversion of a Chronicle history into a personal tragedy and love poem. Plutarch's Antony, though a great soldier, is a man given to dissipation, "full of empty flourishes and unsteady efforts for glory". Shakespeare retains all the defects in the character of Antony, and yet, at the end of the play, we feel one with Octavius Caesar that

"The death of Antony  
is not a single doom ; in the name lay  
A moiety of the world". (V. 1.).

The fact is, Shakespeare has idealised the character through and through, and the process of idealisation has taken away the baseness that was there in the love of Antony and has made it a grand passion. It is really this capacity for a grand passion that differentiates Shakespeare's Antony from Plutarch's. As Maccallum (*Shakespeare's Roman plays and their Background*: Chapter II.) has very aptly remarked : "Plutarch has no eyes for the glory of Antony's madness. He gives the facts or traditions that Shakespeare reproduced, but he regards the whole affair as a pitiable dotage, or at best, as a calamitous visitation—regards it in short much as the Anti-Shakespeareans do now".

The attachment of Plutarch's Antony to Cleopatra is never raised above the vulgarity of lust. In Shakespeare it is an all-absorbing passion to which the dignity and sincerity of love can never be denied. Even Dr. Bradley who, on the ground of sensual passion, is unwilling to call *Antony and Cleopatra* a great tragedy, admits that in the later scenes of the drama Cleopatra definitely assumes the grandeur of a tragic heroine.

We quite agree with Coleridge who wants to place *Antony and Cleopatra* by the side of the great tragedies of Shakespeare. Dr. Middleton Murry, too, says : "The total self-sacrifice of one human being for another in death is the one symbol we have for love". Both Antony and Cleopatra die for each other and thus afford us absolute proof of their sincerity.

Shakespeare has idealised the characters of Antony and Cleopatra without sacrificing realism. He raises the very fatal defects in their characters to the level of magnificence. Plutarch's Antony was addicted to women. Shakespeare admits this trait of his character, and yet, we are given the impression that Antony meets his absolute in Cleopatra. So long, Antony attached himself to many women in this world. But his passion for Cleopatra, by the very magnificence of its immensity, is purged completely of the carnal touch and assumes an elemental character. As Dr. Murry has very rightly said, Shakespeare has converted a "prince of sensuality" into a

"pilgrim of love". Antony was magnificent as a leader of men. He retains the same grandeur and magnificence even in his love :

"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space". ( I . I )

Octavius Cæsar who avoids all excess in life (and in this too, Shakespeare follows Plutarch) can not have the capacity for such a grand passion, and that is the reason why—though a more successful man in the wordly life—he pales into insignificance by the side of his great adversary.

Shakespear's Cleopatra behaves like a coquette, but she does not impress us as a coquette.

The secret of her character, as perceived by Shakespeare, has been explained in the early part of the play, so that we may not have any misconception about her at all. The explanation, again, comes significantly from the mouth of Enobarbus the Cynic :

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety". ( II. 2 ).

It is this "infinite variety" or versatility in the character of Cleopatra which explains the charm of everything she does or says. If she seduces, she is the queen of seduction ; if she enchants, she is a royal enchantress. As a matter of fact, the artist in Antony worships this "infinite variety" in Cleopatra. Plutarch raises the character of Cleopatra in history to a certain extent. Dryden raises her higher still. Shakespeare lowers her than what she is in Plutarch and thus comes closer to history, but at the same time he idealises her. As Victor Hugo aptly remarks : "Dryden is timid, Dryden denies his heroine ; Shakespeare is bold, he proclaims his heroine"

The transformation of the character of the hero and heroine has been effected, apart from the sheer magic of sounds in poetry, through the intensification of the passion, through a supreme sacrifice on the part of the lovers and through Shakespeare's usual reticence in regard to the direct representation of love-scenes. Even in such a mad love-tragedy as *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare introduces very few kisses and embraces, but rather, takes a liberal resort to narration. Shakespeare's originality lies also here, that he

has created so many living minor characters from the slightest hints in Plutarch.

Enobarbus, for example, has been referred to by Plutarch only thrice. We know that Enobarbus is capable, honest and bold, that he forsakes Antony when the latter follows the wrong path, and at the moment of his death is touched by the magnanimity of his old master. Shakespeare's Enobarbus indulges in a soldier's pleasures and yet has a certain contempt for the very vices he shares in. He is critical of all the weaknesses and mistakes of Antony, and yet is raised above the common run by his devotion to his master. Maccallum has very finely summarised the character of Enobarbus in the following words: "Personal attachment to an individual, the one ethical motive that lingers in a world of self-seekers to give existence some dignity and worth, is the inspiration of his soul. But even this he cannot preserve unspoiled; on accepted assumptions he is forced to deny and desecrate it. He succumbs less through his own fault than through the fault of the age: and this is his grand failure. When he realises what it means, there is no need of suicide; he is killed by 'swift thought', by the consciousness that his life with this on his record is loathsome and alien, a 'very rebel to his will' that only 'hangs on him'."

The character of Eros, too, has been elaborately worked out from just a slight hint in Plutarch. To quote Plutarch: "He was then attended by a faithful servant, whose name was Eros. He had engaged this servant to kill him whenever he should think it necessary, and he now demanded that service. Eros drew his sword, as if he designed to kill him, but suddenly turning about, he slew himself, and fell at his master's feet: 'This, Eros, was greatly done', said Antony; 'thy heart would not permit thee to kill thy master, but thou hast taught him what to do by thy example'. He then plunged his sword into his bowels, and threw himself on a couch that stood by".

(Plutarch's Lives :  
Langhorne Translation ;  
Frederick Warne & Co., p. 332).

Shakespeare's Eros is no doubt a faithful servant, but he is much more. His character has a beauty, all its own. His connections with

Antony are much deeper than they are in Plutarch, so that the most pathetic words of Antony are addressed to him: "Unarm Eros; the long day's task is done, and we must sleep." (IV. 14). In this manner, the characters of Iras and Charmian too have assumed a dignity which makes them worthy companions of a Cleopatra.

To take just another example from Shakespeare, viz., *Macbeth*. The source for this play was Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* which supplied materials for all the plays of Shakespeare dealing with events from English history. So far as the principal events in *Macbeth* are concerned, Shakespeare is wonderfully faithful to Holinshed. Thus, we have Macbeth the brave general and the cousin of king Duncan helping the king against his enemies. Banquo is the associate of Macbeth in these achievements. The three 'weird sisters' prophesy that Macbeth will be the king of Scotland, and Banquo, the father of a line of kings. Lady Macbeth instigates her husband to murder king Duncan, and the sons of the murdered king fly away from Scotland. Fearful portents mark the night of the murder. Macbeth, after becoming the king, grows a tyrant and contrives the murder of Banquo. He, however, fails to get hold of Fleance, the son of Banquo. The family of Macduff is murdered too, in the absence of Macduff himself. Macbeth consults the weird sisters for the second time and is lulled into a false sense of security. At last, Malcolm with the help of England, overthrows Macbeth from the throne. But here the likeness between Holinshed and Shakespeare ends. The departures of Shakespeare are far more significant than his borrowings.

In the *Chronicles* the rebellion of Macdonwald, the invasion of Sweno, and a subsequent attack upon Scotland by the forces of Canute are three distinct events which took place at different times. Shakespeare combines them all into one. This departure exalts the position of Macbeth as a great soldier and consequently, his fall will seem to be more tragic. Again, in Holinshed, Macdonwald commits suicide. In Shakespeare we have him killed by the hand of Macbeth. This, too, serves to heighten the heroic quality in the character of Macbeth.

One of the most significant deviations from the source is the murder of Duncan. The details of the murder have been taken from the story of king Duff in the *Chronicles*. But even there, Shakespeare has introduced changes. In Holinshed king Duff is murdered by

four hired servants. In Shakespeare, however, it is Macbeth himself who murders Duncan. This intensifies the horror of Macbeth's crime. He was trusted and honoured by the king. There was also the relation of blood between the two. Above all, Duncan was the guest at the house of Macbeth. After all this, the murder of Duncan by Macbeth himself comes to us as a gross violation of all the moral laws in the universe. In the Chronicle Banquo is murdered while returning from the banquet. In Shakespeare Banquo is murdered on his way to the banquet. By this device Shakespeare prepares us for the terrible scene in which the Ghost of Banquo appears. Then again, the historical Macbeth reigned for seventeen years. Shakespeare has considerably curtailed the time of action in order to maintain the unity of time which intensifies the dramatic effect.

The main characters, too, are handled by Shakespeare in a completely different manner. The character of Duncan has been heightened, whereas that of Macbeth has been blackened. Holinshed's Duncan was rather weak, inefficient and young in age. Shakespeare has made the king an old man and almost an ideal monarch. Holinshed's Macbeth was an able and just king at least in the early part of his reign. Shakespeare's Macbeth is so intent on removing the future obstacles to his throne, that he has no time to look to the promotion of justice and peace in his kingdom. All these changes are, however, very important in order to show the enormity of Macbeth's crime and the consequent intensity of the tragic waste. The character of Banquo, too, has been exalted, so that he might serve as a foil to Macbeth. For Lady Macbeth's character Holinshed left only a few hints. She was a woman inordinately ambitious, "burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen". But out of this Shakespeare creates a character magnificent in her own grandeur. In regard to the witches, too, Shakespeare does not follow Holinshed in toto. The weird sisters are mentioned by the Chronicler only in connection with the first prophecy that Macbeth should be the king. The warning against Macbeth came from a certain wizard, and the prophecy as to the Birnam Wood came from a witch "whom he had in great trust". Shakespeare has only one set of witches gifted with more than usual powers. This, no doubt, is a tremendous gain from the point of view of dramatic economy and effect.



But the above is not all. None of those scenes which make *Macbeth* what it is—one of the grandest of all artistic creations—has any counterpart in Holinshed. Thus, the very first scene of the play, the scene which takes us to a desolate heath and strikes the keynote of the drama with :

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair :

Hover through the fog and filthy air”

is Shakespeare's own. The dagger-scene (II. 1.), again, has no counterpart in Holinshed. The agonised feeling of *Macbeth* finds the deepest expression in :

“But wherefore could not I pronounce ‘Amen’ ?

I had most need of blessing, and ‘Amen’

Stuck in my throat”

(II. 2)

Or

“What hands are here ? ha ! they pluck out mine eyes !

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand ? No ; this my hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

Making the green one red”. (II. 2)

All this makes the scene profoundly moving and pathetic. The banquet-scene (III. 4) is no less terrible and intense, and this, too, has been Shakespeare's own creation. Finally, the great sleep-walking scene (V. 1), a supreme creation of the artistic genius, has absolutely no counterpart in the *Chronicles*. Tragic terror has perhaps never been raised higher than it is in such lines : “all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh !”

The incalculability of evil has been shown with consummate art. And yet, how simple are the words !

The same transformation of the subject-matter in Art is prominent in any great historical novel. We shall take up *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens as an example.

A historical novel seems at first sight to be a contradiction in terms, for how could the claims of the world of facts and those of fiction be reconciled ? But that is precisely what is done in a historical novel. Sir Walter Scott changed the facts of history in the interest of romance. That is why his novels have been criticised as

"spurious history deviating into fiction". Bulwer Lytton and Ebers gave a truer picture of history. But it is in Thackeray and Dickens that we really find a work of fiction in which the authenticity of the main features of history is still retained.

The historical background of *A Tale of Two Cities* relates to the French Revolution. Dickens draws his materials of history mainly from Carlyle's *French Revolution*, but he has woven the adventures of fictitious personages round the historical facts. History serves merely as a background. Dickens does not introduce any historical character. His method is rather to give us a picture of the times, of the societies in France and England, of the political condition in France before and during the Revolution. He cares nothing about introducing a continuous historical narrative, nothing about the chief actors of the French Revolution. It is rather the results of the actions of the great leaders that appear than the men themselves. In regard to these results, however, Dickens follows Carlyle very closely. The novelist himself tells us in the Preface that his intention was "to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book".

And there is no doubt that Dickens has been successful in carrying out his own design. Still, however, fault has been found with his treatment of history. He has been accused of anachronism, of placing people in the past who could only belong to his own times. Again, his Marquis has been spoken of by Bulwer Lytton as well as by Dr. Ward as a historically questionable character. Dickens, however, has given his own justification: "Although the surrender of the feudal privileges (on a motion seconded by a nobleman of great rank) was the occasion of a sentimental scene, I see no reason to doubt, but on the contrary many reasons to believe, that some of these privileges had been used to the frightful oppression of the peasant, quite as near to the time of the Revolution as the Doctor's narrative, which you will remember, dates long before the terror. And surely when the new philosophy was the talk of the salons and the slang of the hour.. it is not unreasonable or unallowable to suppose a nobleman wedded to the old cruel ideas, and representing the time going out, as his nephew represents the time coming in".

The fact is that the account of history that we have in *A Tale of Two Cities* is broadly true. The minor inaccuracies do not take away anything from the merit of the book as a piece of literature. The individual characters are all the creations of Dickens himself ; and it is round the immortal characters of Sydney Carton and Lucie Manette, of Charles Darnay and Jarvis Lorry, of Monsieur Defarge and Madame Defarge that the interest of the novel is mainly centred. The terrible Revolution has no mercy for any particular individual. Dickens goes deep down into the individual hearts set against a background of tumult.

The discussions carried so long in regard to the transformation of the theme or subject-matter in Art show us one point undoubtedly. Art is subject matter and the personality of the artist combined into one ; it is subject matter as viewed by the artist. Subjects or themes are always there in the world of facts or they may be supplied by the imagination of the artist himself. But even when they come from the artist's mind, they are ultimately connected with the real world. So the theme of Art is a product of the world of reality. But a work of Art is always "*homo additus naturae*"—man added to nature, the skylark moulded by Wordsworth, Antony as looked upon by Shakespeare.

## SHELLEY ON THE 'SPIRIT OF THE AGE'

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THIS short paper\* argues that the concept of the 'spirit of the age' working through the literature of a particular period, which Shelley advances in his *Defence of Poetry*, is a continuation and a fuller working out of a position already suggested in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, a treatise on theoretical and practical politics which preceded the *Defence*. This concept puts poetic creativity within a deterministic framework. But Shelley's determinism here is of the historical rather than the transcendentalist kind; and seeks to place creative literature within the dynamic totality of human activities.

The last paragraph in *Defence of Poetry*\* where the term 'spirit of the age' occurs, was probably also meant to be a preamble to the projected second part of the *Defence*. Shelley had promised that this second part would apply the principles of the first 'to the present state of the cultivation of poetry and [provide] a defence of the attempt to idealize the modern forms of manners and opinions, and compel them into a subordination to the imaginative and creative faculty'.<sup>1</sup> Had Shelley lived to realize this plan and the other project he had of bringing out a second edition of *Adonais* with an essay on *Hyperion*<sup>2</sup>, we would have had a sustained demonstration of some of the theoretical assumptions which appear in the *Defence* as it stands today. But even as it is, one can piece together the significance of the concept of the 'spirit of the age' within the total framework of Shelley's poetics.

One may note to start with that this passage is lifted with few changes, out of the first chapter of Shelley's unfinished *Philosophical View of Reform*.<sup>3</sup> It had been written at the end of 1819, around the time when he was also writing the belated Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*, and slightly more than a year before he was provoked to produce his *Defence* (Feb.-Mar. 1821) as an answer to Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry*. Shelley's plans of getting *Philosophical View*

published fell through in his life time ; after his death, those in possession of his papers kept it hidden away, more or less, as one more skeleton in the Shelley-cupboard, until it finally saw the light of day more than a hundred years after its composition, in 1920.

Richard Holmes points out quite rightly that the treatise is not merely a 'philosophical view of reform' but an actual 'philosophy of revolution and specifically the philosophy of the English revolution.'<sup>4</sup> His extremely cautious and sobre approach towards practical politics here does not tend towards an indefinite postponement of political action until men are spiritually reformed. The pressure he wishes to exert on the government is the pressure of a concerted, conscious mass-movement of which progressive intellectuals from all ranks of society must be the leaders. In the treatise, Shelley is laying out the principles which must supply the basis of such organized movement. If we look at the treatise from this angle, Cameron's assertion that 'it is this combination of the general and the particular, of vision and practicality that makes *A Philosophical View* ... the most advanced work of political theory of the age',<sup>5</sup> seems to be no more than a bare statement of fact.

When Reginald White places *Defence* side by side with *Philosophical View* under the heading of 'political tracts', on the ground that taken together they afford the materials for a synthesis of Plato and Godwin,<sup>6</sup> he seems to be doing the right deed for the wrong reason. These two treatises are connected with each other not in the sense that Shelley's incomplete conversion from the necessitarianism of Godwin to Platonic 'voluntarism' is completed in *Defence*, but in the sense that in these two tracts Shelley is looking at the two aspects of an intellectual's function in society — in the first, he is seen participating directly in political action, writing petitions, leading deputations and addressing people for the implementation of a radical, democratic programme ; in the second, we see him specifically in relation to his craft as a creative artist, but this is ultimately a special manifestation of his relationship with society as a whole. From the point of view of *Defence*, *Philosophical View* offers a broader background for the creative activities of the poet.

In 1819, Shelley seems to have believed that poetry as a mode of cognition and communication supplements, but does not substitute, the reasoned system of philosophy. In a letter to Peacock (Jan. 26,

1819), he had said: 'I consider poetry very subordinate to moral philosophy', and had expressed his ambition of producing 'a great work embodying the discoveries of all ages and harmonising the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled'.<sup>7</sup> A more well-considered articulation of the same wish is to be found in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: 'Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appears to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Aeschylus rather than Plato as my model'. In order to produce a 'reasoned system on the theory of human life', one must be trained at the philosopher's rather than the creative artist's school. But while this remains out of his reach for the time being, he implicitly acknowledges the poet's right to move towards cognition through intuitions and emotions. The subtle, indirect and emotive manner in which poetry communicates ideas indicates both the strength and the limitation of such communication. For a work so complex and sophisticated as *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley's design is but modest, extending only to the 'more select classes of poetical readers', who have already accepted in theory 'reasoned principles of moral conduct'<sup>8</sup>. Shelley's abhorrence of 'didactic' poetry is explicable as a corollary to his ideas as to how poetry works; the presumptuous offering of cut-and-dried solutions where one should still be groping for them, is directly antagonistic to the knowledge of truth and to the 'passion for reforming the world' which according to Shelley, goes with it.

Is there any reason to suppose that Shelley changed his mind regarding the relationship of philosophy and poetry a year later? True, in *Defence*, he contrasts the achievements of 'mere reasoners' like Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire etc. with those of poets and says that 'it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, nor Milton had lived...', but one should not overlook Lord Bacon's name in the list of poets. Elsewhere in *Defence*, Plato and Rousseau are included in the same category. In fact, Shelley himself explains that he is here using the terms 'poet' and 'poetry' in both a general and a specific sense.<sup>10</sup> In the general sense, poetry signifies any 'direct

expression of the inventive and creative faculty', innovation in thought or in vision in any form. The harmony of thoughts which gives authenticity to any genuine innovation is reflected in the 'rhythmical and harmonious language' used by the innovator. 'All the authors of revolutions in opinion' are poets first by virtue of their inventiveness and second by virtue of the formal harmony embodied in their inventions. It is only in the context of this general meaning of the words 'poetry' and 'poets' that Shakespeare, Dante and Milton, who are poets in a more specific sense, get praised as 'philosophers of the very loftiest power'. Innovators in thought and philosophical poets are working towards the common goal of knowledge through different modes, and are, as such, to be distinguished both from mere reasoners and mere versifiers.

In the 'spirit of the age' passage in *Philosophical View*, both poets and philosophers are acclaimed as the 'unacknowledged legislators' of the world. 'Philosophers' are omitted from this sentence in *Defence* not because Shelley has revised his opinion on the matter in the meantime, but because in this essay it is with 'poets' in the more specific sense that he is primarily concerned. However, the generic sense always forms its background; and while the word 'philosopher' is dropped in this particular sentence, elsewhere in the same passage 'poets' and 'philosophers' are placed side by side, or brought together under the common denomination of 'writers' of the present day in whose words an 'electric life' burns.

Shelley's attempt to assign poetry its proper place within the totality of human knowledge and practice is radically different from the efforts of critics of culture of a later generation—like Carlyle and Matthew Arnold—to show poetry as superseding all other forms of knowledge and practice<sup>11</sup>. Shelley asserts in the *Defence*-passage that a new development in the sphere of poetry sometimes 'precedes' political awakening and seems to evolve a life of its own without any assistance from the other spheres of social action. But it is not really a question of which precedes which in the chronology of events; a broader perspective enables one to understand that the general dynamics of human history lies behind the interwoven development of all these forms of action. Poetry is the 'most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution'.

Thus, the 'spirit of the age' passage in *Defence*, far from suggesting a revision of Shelley's opinions in *A Philosophical View*, indicates a continuity. The positive role of intellectuals in general, and of poets in particular, in the drama of social change, is elaborated more fully in *Defence* than there had been scope for in *A Philosophical View*. In fact, this is the key-passage in *Defence*, and gives us an insight into its central theme.

The term 'spirit of the age' appears in Shelley's letters in late 1819. In a letter to Ollier (Oct. 15, 1819), he answers the *Quarterly Review's* charge that he is an imitator of Wordsworth and says that the similarity between co-temporary poets is the result of 'the spirit of that age acting on all'.<sup>12</sup> The idea, in fact, goes back to the preface of *The Revolt of Islam* (pub. 1818): 'there must be a resemblance, which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age'. 'Subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live' is a necessary precondition for a writer to become 'the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded'.<sup>13</sup> When in the Preface to *Prometheus*, Shelley asserts that 'philosophers' and creative artists are 'in one sense the creators, and in another, the creations'<sup>14</sup> of the age, the theoretical assumptions behind it are the same. Shelley's use of the time-honoured mirror-metaphor for art in this connection emphasizes this subjection from which the 'loftiest do not escape', as the ultimate determinant of creativity.

In both these prefaces, the concept of poetic creativity is specified as the power of bringing into being a change in the mental state of the auditors. In the earlier preface these 'internal powers' are said to be 'excited and sustained' by 'external influences', by 'all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he (i.e. the poet) ever admitted to act upon his consciousness'. Only when the mind becomes a mirror 'upon which all forms are reflected', can one presume to the more essential attribute of Poetry, 'the power of awakening in others sensations' like those which animate the poet's bosom. In the preface to *Prometheus* poetic creation is said to consist of combination and representation. 'Poetic abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in nature,



but because the whole produced by their combination has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought, and with the contemporary condition of them'.

In *Defence*, this position is not rejected, but carried a step further. The concept of creativity in the sense of producing an effect upon the auditor is reinforced by a much greater emphasis on creativity in the sense of cognitive reorganization of the materials of experience, the 'accident of surrounding impressions'. Poetry defeats the 'curse which binds us to be subjected' to these. The curse lies in the limitedness, the distorted subjective character of these impressions. The curse is not our subjection to the objective world ; but our subjection to the limited impressions we form of it. Poetry removes the curse by resolving the contradiction between appearance and reality, between abstract knowledge and practice. 'It compels us to feel that which we perceive and to imagine that which we know'.<sup>15</sup> To imagine 'intensely and comprehensively' means for Shelley that the poet 'must put himself in the place of another and of many others ; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own'. It is not merely a contemplative principle, but an active principle and necessarily a prologue to social action — 'the great instrument of moral good'.<sup>16</sup>

In the preface to *Prometheus*, a form-content dualism had been suggested at least in one of the paragraphs where Shelley had stated that content in a work of art is the product of individual genius while forms are shared in common by co-temporary poets and are the 'endowment of the age in which they live'.<sup>17</sup> This is an extremely mechanical formulation and tends to slur over the key-idea in the preface that the most sensitive minds operating at a particular time in history are the most sensitive precisely because they capture and communicate the most significant characteristics of that time. A much clearer and more sophisticated stand on the relationship of form and content is worked out by Shelley in *Defence*. The 'spirit of the age'-thesis is based on the concept of the ultimate primacy of content and, at the same time, overrides the mechanical view of 'form' as an alien straitjacket imposed upon individual genius. In the maturer aesthetics of Shelley, form is both the means through which the content is realized, and the realization itself ; 'language, gesture, and the imitative arts become at once the representation and

the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony'.<sup>18</sup> Individual genius then, consists in the capacity for responding most sensitively to 'the spirit of the age', and in a poet it further extends to the capacity for working out the form which ensures its most effective communication.

Form in the other sense, in the sense of existing social and linguistic conventions that embody a certain kind of content, may in great poets like Homer, Dante and Milton be in contradiction with the more complete meaning they seek to put into it. Popular theology embodying 'distorted notions of invisible things' supplied the intellectual framework both for Dante and Milton, just as Homer's framework [in the *Iliad*] had been the concept of revenge, 'the naked idol of the worship of a semi-barbarous age'. But to a generation that finds such conventions retrograde distortions of reality, they are merely 'the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised'.<sup>19</sup> The poets themselves may or may not be conscious of this, in fact, quite often they are not, and this is the context of Shelley's oft-misunderstood statement that the poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and 'sings to cheer his own solitude with sweet sounds'. This is taken to mean that the poet composes and should compose for himself alone; but the major thrust of the statement which carries the effectiveness of poetry beyond the conscious intentions of the poet is very often missed. The point Shelley is making here is that just as the poet has to receive in order to give during the act of creation itself, similarly once the period of incubation is over, the product may show possibilities of which he himself may not be conscious, of which only a different generation, looking at the work from a very different point of view may have any comprehension.

This is precisely where the concept of the 'spirit of the age' comes in as a most apt formulation. Dante and Milton had consciously contributed to the theological beliefs of their time, which a more scientific era finds unacceptable. But in both cases, the actual poetic presentation of these beliefs also seems to contain a critique of these beliefs which implies a more comprehensive grasp over reality than these would allow. It is this quality in their works which, in spite of their conscious acceptance of certain 'forms' of belief in their time, makes them meaningful to subsequent generations.

Whether one recognizes any objective basis for Shelley's interpretation of Dante as a 'heretic' and of Satan in *Paradise Lost* as a 'moral being far superior to his [Milton's] God' or not, one can scarcely find a loophole in Shelley's theoretical position here. But the question remains: if these so-called 'accidental vestures' are borrowed from the age, then can the poet's involuntary transcendence of these in his poetry be said to be the result of individual genius? This is where usually the critic sits back with folded hands and allows the poet to have his day. 'Individual genius' *per se* is a concept which has to be accepted or rejected, but cannot be discussed. But indeed if the workings of individual genius are to be understood at a more concrete level, the concept of the 'spirit of the age' as Shelley sees it has to be introduced within our perception of genius as well.

Shelley's examples of great imaginative literature come from ages which are shown to be in an intellectual and political ferment. The general movement towards the liberation of the human mind and of man's social activities invariably supplies the background for great literature. When such movement is temporarily in abeyance, literary energy also flags. The point-to-point correspondence that Shelley tries to show in his historical account of European literature from Homer to Dante in *Defence* may sometimes miss the mark, but his over-all theoretical stand that individual genius draws its sustenance not only from the socio-linguistic conventions but also from the general intellectual climate which may contain possibilities of calling these same into question, is quite unassailable. Thus, it is the forward-looking 'spirit of the age' as well as the apparently immovable external forms of the age that individual genius feeds upon.

When the thesis is applied by Shelley to his own time, the idea of the 'spirit of the age' is further enriched. K. N. Cameron has shown with exhaustive evidence<sup>30</sup> that a deep-seated discontent with Enlightenment materialism did not mean for Shelley an inevitable reversal to Berkeleian or Platonic, or Kantian, or any other brand of Idealism, so that at no stage is history the mere reflection of a higher order of reality for him; so far as he is concerned, history is the reality. Shelley's general philosophical position in his later years was that of an empiricist sceptic according to Cameron, though this scepticism

was a contingency measure rather than an ultimate Humean acceptance of the unknowability of the nature of reality. However, human history is one area where the intermediate stance of the sceptic is not necessary for him. In this sphere, he feels that he can start working with an acceptable hypothesis. The dynamics of history is a knowable, if yet largely unknown, reality for him.

As Shelley sees it, the law which activates this changing reality is that of progress towards a more perfect, that is, more liberated society, which can be achieved within the bounds of history. To this extent, Shelley remains faithful to his Enlightenment predecessors like Diderot, De Holbach, Condorcet and Godwin. His deterministic position is stated in the foreword to *Philosophical View*, where reform is seen to be necessary not merely 'because it is just and ought to be' but because it is 'inevitable and must be'.<sup>21</sup> His deviation from the mainline of 18th century materialism however, lies in that he positively rejects the individualistic ethics which is used as a palliative for their deterministic world-view. Their exaltation of reason as a principle residing within each individual, and reconciling self-interest with social interest is for Shelley a betrayal of the very purpose of rationalism.

Shelley's is an ennobling determinism which takes into account the growing liberation of the human mind from the self-created bonds of ignorance as it comes to a greater and greater understanding of necessity. What had seemed to be realized through the accident of individual genius in earlier times, now seems to be accepted more and more widely as the universal law. His comments on *Laon and Cythna* [*Revolt of Islam*] made to a publisher (Oct. 13, 1817) present the theme of the poem 'as the *beau ideal* of the French Revolution, but produced by influence of individual genius, and not out of general knowledge'.<sup>22</sup> Although the spirit of 'liberty and equality' had been manifested intermittently in the Athenian republic, in the early days of the Christian Church and in the broad-based militancy of the Reformation (Shelley sees uprisings among oppressed peasantry as a prelude to it), nevertheless it is also a 'new spirit' in the context of Shelley's own times. History is not the mere mundane reflection of the circular rhythm of struggle between the two eternal principles of liberty and tyranny, the serpent and the eagle in *The Revolt of Islam*. There is a genuine advance as the struggle proceeds; in modern times, the

spirit of liberation has truly become the spirit of the age, so far as the predominant tendency of opinions goes. It is 'new' in this sense. The institutions however—the media of social action, still lag behind. They have to be brought on a par with professed beliefs. The spurious ethics of 'self-interest' hinders this development. While political action seeks to change these institutions, poets and intellectuals must supply the correct impetus to such action by working upon the imagination of the auditors, and indirectly loosening the roots of 'self-interest'. This had been hinted at even earlier in Shelley's writings; any one who has read *Prometheus* carefully cannot fail to notice that the transition from Act III to Act IV consists in the submergence of the vision of an individualistic Utopia into the glorious excitement of socialized advance towards new spheres of knowledge and power attainable within the bounds of time.

Both in *A refutation of Deism* (1814) and in the fragmentary *On Life* (1819-20), Shelley asserts that the mind can only perceive, it cannot create, and concludes from this that the mind cannot create itself, and the cause of mind must be something other than mind.<sup>23</sup> This view echoes the argument of Eleatic materialists like Parmenides as presented in a treatise Shelley admired for its intellectual militancy—William Drummond's *Academical Questions*.<sup>24</sup> This epistemological determinism is carried a step further in Shelley's use of the Berkeleyian formula that 'All things exist as they are perceived' in the *Defence*. But he adds a rider to it: 'at least in relation to the percipients'. This suggests that he is using the formula only to express his doubts of empirical reality, and to suggest the existing limits of human knowledge. It is not meant to negate the existence of objective reality and to nurture those solipsistic conclusions which both empiricism and idealism tend to culminate in.

In *Defence*, the concept of creativity is seen to consist in the power of poetry to release us, even temporarily, from this epistemological determinism. But, as I have pointed out earlier, even here the concept of creativity does not have that transcendentalist thrust which it acquires in Coleridge, for instance, who asserts that he receives but what he gives. For Shelley, creativity always works on the basis of certain given historical circumstances and works back upon these again. The epistemological break, the critical moment in human inventiveness which leads to a new perception of reality, uses

a particular historical ensemble as its landing place and turns back to work on that ensemble. Even Hazlitt and Keats, who are certainly no transcendentalists so far as their ideas regarding imagination go, do not carry the logic of imagination being a true perception of reality to its most radical conclusion that this true perception may then lead, however indirectly, to changing reality. Shelley's position, in this respect, is courageous rather than rash, since it tallies with the considered logical framework of his aesthetics as a whole.

Though this passage resembles in some ways the passage on poetic inspiration in Plato's *Ion* which Shelley translated,<sup>25</sup> it completely rejects *Ion's* peculiar brand of other-wordly determinism. Shelley's philosopher-poet is not possessed by a divine frenzy; the agency that brings him to an often unintentioned reviewing of reality is the 'spirit of the age', that is, the progressive, dynamic tendencies manifested in the vast complex of social relationships. Shelley's stand on this is not that of an empiricist; all that happen in an age are not collectively the 'spirit of the age'. The overall deterministic framework does not absolve the poet of the intellectual duty of discovering what the principles of determination are, which aspects of his times belong to the past and which to the future. He cannot sit back on the assumption that whatever is, is valid. Nor does he passively wait for that 'spirit' to descend upon him. Even as he lays himself open to all kinds of external influences he seeks to clarify certain principles of choice.

His plea to intellectuals in *Philosophical View* to get together, draw up petitions, and lead deputations to the parliament, should be taken side by side with his defence of *Hyperion* as a truly philosophical poem, and his appeal to Byron to write a great, connected poem which will bear the same relation to this age as the *Iliad*, the *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* did to theirs. That way, 'long after the *man* is dead, the immortal spirit may survive and speak like one belonging to higher world'.<sup>26</sup> This spirit is the 'spirit of the age' and it makes it incumbent that intellectuals and poets, whether consciously or unconsciously, become part and parcel of the future development of the human race by actively contributing to it.

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In this paper, I have discussed Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, but I

have also tried to work out a defence of Shelley's poetics as a whole. I am aware that the thesis of Shelley's historical consciousness as a literary critic has to confront certain difficulties. Shelley's language, which is replete with metaphors, at times exhibits a strong idealistic tendency that is hard to reconcile with the historical sense that manifests itself in the concept of the 'spirit of the age'. In fact, the term 'spirit' itself may be called into question. But while these may be regarded at worst as contradictions within an overall framework of thought, the other view of Shelley as the rhetorician of a transcendentalist inspiration, as an idealist who considers the dynamic movements of life as nothing more than external projections of mental categories merely reinforces a conspiracy of silence against the most vital parts of the text itself. The highest tribute is due to Shelley as a theoretician of literature in so far as he is almost the only person in his time to try to evolve a genuinely historical view of literature. He goes much further than the data collectors of a later generation, who explore literature to extract historical materials from it. History and literature are not for him adjacent disciplines which may from time to time help each other, but he tries to put literature in the totality of the historical process. Nor did this lead him into the vulgarity of forgetting that literature has to work according to its own methods. He seeks to explain the apparent contradiction with historical tendencies that one finds in literature by making his hypothesis more comprehensive instead of rejecting it. He steers clear both of the eclectic manner in which Hazlitt and later J. S. Mill interpret the spirit of the age, and of the view of poetry as standing above history, which gained currency in the second half of the 19th century. These safer interpretations pushed Shelley's militant aesthetics into the shade for the time being.

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\* This paper was read and discussed at a seminar organized by the English Study Centre, Calcutta, in March 1981.

The last paragraph of Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* is :

'The second part will have for its object an application of these principles to the present state of the cultivation of poetry, and a defence of the attempt to idealize the modern forms of manners and opinions, and compel them into a subordination to the imaginative and creative faculty. For the literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will, has arisen as it were from a new birth. In spite of the low-thoughted envy which would undervalue

contemporary merit, our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty. The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power resides may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with that spirit of good of which they are the ministers. But even whilst they deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve, the power which is seated on the throne of their own soul. It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations; for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'

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## FORSTER'S *HOWARDS END* : CHARACTER OF MARGARET

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SURABHI CHAKRABARTY

ACCORDING to some critics Forster could never adequately depict a woman. The character of Margaret in *Howards End*, however, seems to be a refutation of this charge.<sup>1</sup> Margaret combines spiritual instinct and imagination with ratiocination as well as a realisation of the inadequacy of both. Her beliefs are anchored in 'the inner life' and 'personal relationships'; she is aware of the inane triviality of bright cultured talk of 'the gibbering monkeys' (88). At the same time she can candidly admit that 'money pads the edges of things' (72) and 'that the very soul of the world is economic, and that the lowest abyss is not the absence of love, but the absence of coin' (72). A liberal humanist by conviction, a persona of her author in this, she hopes to achieve harmony by reconciling the polarities of the inner and the outer, the past and the present, and the seen and the unseen.

Margaret may be described as a 'round' character in Forster's own sense of the term, who is 'capable of surprising in a convincing way'.<sup>2</sup> She can and does develop in course of action. The process of transfiguration from the Miss Schlegel of Wickham Place to Mrs Margaret Wilcom, is gradual as well as elaborate. The nuances of this psychological metamorphosis are felt on the stylistic level of the text. On the basis of certain adducible indicators reflecting the process of development, one can amend the common misreading of her character.

### 1. Forster's Second Chapter

The second chapter of '*Howards End*' centres on Margaret. The chapter directly presents Margaret in conversation with her Aunt Juley (Mrs Munt), in intermittent meditations, and in movements and gestures. The chapter opens with Margaret at the breakfast-table with her aunt, reading Helen's 'note' which announced 'Paul and I are in love'; it comes to a close with Margaret reading Helen's

telegram : 'All over. Wish I had never written. Tell no one'. But Aunt Juley has been told, and she is gone to Howards End 'irrevocably'.

The chief function of the chapter is to imprint in the reader's mind what may be called an outline of Margaret's character. The reader is introduced to Margaret and certain initial impressions are formed. The sketch has to be incomplete, rudimentary and even tentative. The character cannot be fully discerned or comprehended until we see her in various other contexts of other incidents and other characters. Moreover, the character will change, will develop. Yet a framework of at least some of her distinctive traits must be provided at the beginning, and whatever additional information may be furnished subsequently and whatever development may occur, must be relevant to this initial outline. Therefore, the presentation of Margaret's character in this second chapter of the novel must be carefully attended.

A close reading of the chapter reveals Forster's use of several devices for presenting Margaret. One of them is explicit statements by the 'reliable' omniscient narrator, who, in this case, is the author himself. About the middle of the chapter occurs the following sentence :

Away she hurried, not beautiful, not supremely brilliant, but filled with something that took the place of both qualities— something best described as a profound vivacity, a continual and sincere response to all that she encountered in her path through life (25).

'Response' here is a key-word for in responding one is oneself ; it is also allied to 'profound vivacity' which in her character, operates instinctively and enables her to respond 'to all that she encountered' in her perpetual quest for harmony.

The sentence is 'foregrounded'. It is clearly set apart from other sentences by the fact that the sentence is a paragraph, placed between two paragraphs of dialogue. It is also foregrounded by the syntax. The following features of the syntax are noticeable :

(i) The sentence opens with an adverb : 'away'. But this 'inversion' is muted,—we have 'Away she hurried' instead of 'Away hurried she'. The emphasis, therefore, is not on the adverb, though the opening adverb is a signal that this sentence requires a different kind of attention.

(ii) The grammatical principal clause ('she hurried away') does not in fact convey the main information of the sentence. The main information is in the long adjectival clause or rather the series of clauses which constitute the description of Margaret—'not beautiful ...' etc.

(iii) The clauses which describe Margaret have the effect of what Wimsatt calls 'the epithetical cumulative subject'.<sup>5</sup>

(iv) The syntax creates a marked rhythm, the emphasis shifting to the end of the sentence. As a result, we get the effect of increasing momentum as we proceed along the sentence, and the final clause ('a continual and sincere response ... life') acquires unusual significance.

The syntax indicates that the author deliberately intended this quality ('a continual and sincere response ... life') of Margaret to be embossed as distinctive for the character. This quality remains fixed and unaffected by subsequent changes and developments in her character.

There is another such explicit statement by the narrator in this chapter :

'Certainly Margaret was impulsive. She did swing rapidly from one decision to another' (26).

This seems to corroborate Mrs Munt's opinion that Margaret was a 'little hysterical' (23) and was, therefore, likely 'to offend the whole of these Wilcoxes by asking' one of 'her impetuous questions' (24). Mrs Munt, however, is not a 'reliable' narrator, and the epithet 'a little hysterical' would require modifying. Mrs Munt's reading of Margaret's character is not only superficial but ironic as well, for it is she who offends Charles Wilcox by asking him a number of 'impetuous' and indiscreet questions.

Forster's second device for characterizing Margaret in this chapter is the use of a number of significant verbs of action and gesture. The novelist, however, does use a number of non-significant verbs, which, though lexical, do in fact perform a merely grammatical function in a narrative. Examples of such non-significant, or neutral verbs are 'said' in 'I'll go for her other betters', *said* Margaret (22); or, 'continued' in 'I consider you odd girls'—*continued* Mrs Munt, 'and very wonderful girls' ... (24).

The following are the instances of significant verbs used with Margaret in this chapter : (the verbs in the dialogue passages are excluded for the moment) :

1. Margaret *glanced* at her sister's note and *pushed* it over the breakfast table to her aunt (21).
2. She *waved* her hand and *laughed* a little (22).
3. She *broke off* and *listened to* the sounds of a London morning (22-23).
4. Margaret *leaned forward* and *stroked* her (Mrs Munt's) head (23).
5. Margaret *was silent* (24).
6. ... She *jumped up* and *kissed* her (24).
7. Away she *hurried*... (25).
8. Margaret *was down* on this (25).
9. Her eyes *lit up* (25).
10. Margaret again *thanked* her, again *kissed* her and then *ran* upstairs to see her brother (26).
11. Certainly Margaret *was impulsive*. She *did swing rapidly* from one decision to another (26).
12. *Running* downstairs into the library, she cried : 'Yes,...' (26).
13. Margaret *was able to drive* her aunt to the station (26).
14. Even Margaret *shrank* from it (expounding the personal nature of love), and *contented herself* with *stroking* her good aunt's hand with meditating, half sensibly and half poetically on the journey... (26).
15. Margaret, on her return to Wickham Place, *was confronted* with the following telegram... (27).
16. And her eyes began to *shine* (23).
17. ... but as she only *loved* a sister she *used* the voiceless language of sympathy (24).

On the basis of these verbs,—'glanced' and 'pushed', 'broke off and listened', 'leaned forward and stroked', 'hurried', 'was down on' 'eyes lit up', 'began to shine', 'again thanked', 'again kissed', 'then ran upstairs', 'did swing rapidly', 'Running down stairs ... cried', 'was able to drive', 'shrank', 'contented with ...', 'stroking', 'loved' — we almost form the picture of a woman in constant motion, agile, active and vivacious. These are the verbs that correspond to the quality defined as 'profound vivacity' and 'a sincere and continual response to all that she encountered in her path through life'. This 'profound vivacity' in action and gesture is accompanied by quick and expansive speech. Margaret is not only articulate, she is 'lively', 'vivacious' in conversation. The second chapter opens with :

Margaret glanced at her sister's note and pushed it over the breakfast table to her aunt. There was a moment's hush, and then the floodgates opened (21).

If this might suggest that Margaret is 'silent, taciturn' and 'the floodgates' allude to the excited and anxious questions asked by her aunt, then such a notion would at once be removed by the dialogues that follow. Mrs Munt's questions are given, justifying the word 'floodgate', but Margaret is certainly not quiet. We are told by the narrator that Mrs Munt decided that Margaret was 'a little hysterical' and 'was trying to gain time by a torrent of talk' (23). Mrs Munt is not to be taken seriously, as she is the object of amused affection of her nieces. But the phrase 'torrent of talk' is not altogether inaccurate. The narrator does use such phrases elsewhere; both the sisters, he says, were 'tremendous talkers' (44) and even the word 'garrulous' ('excitable, garrulous'...185), is used for Margaret; her garrulity is also related to 'the demon of vociferation' (84).

## 2. Margaret and Mrs Wilcox

The significance of these indicators for the character of Margaret at this stage is best grasped when Margaret is placed in the presence of Ruth Wilcox—an enigmatic, quasi-symbolic figure, the tutelary genius of Howards End.<sup>8</sup> In the opening chapter of the novel she is briefly described in Helen's letter to Margaret:

... and Mrs. Wilcox was already in the garden. She evidently loves it. No wonder she sometimes looks tired. She was watching the large red poppies come out. ...Trail, trail, went her long dress over the spring grass, and she came back with her hands full of the hay that was cut yesterday... (20),

And finally Mrs Wilcox reappears, trail, trail, still smelling hay and looking at the flowers. (20)

and,

... Mrs Wilcox, if quieter than in Germany, is sweeter than ever, and I never saw anything like her steady unselfishness... (20-21)

In Chapter III, Mrs Wilcox's voice is heard from the garden in the midst of the noisy scene between Mrs Munt, Charles, Paul and Helen:

'Charles dear', said a voice from the garden, 'Charles, dear Charles, one doesn't ask plain questions. There aren't such things.'

They were all silent. It was Mrs Wilcox. She approached just as Helen's letters had described her, trailing noiselessly over the lawn, and there was actually a wisp of hay in her hands. She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that over-shadowed it. (36)

And when they had obeyed her she turned to her elder son, who still stood in the throbbing, stinking car, and smiled at him with tenderness, and without saying a word turned away from him towards her flowers. (36-37).

The first meeting of Margaret and Mrs Wilcox in the novel is described in Chapter VIII. We leave out, however, their meeting in Germany which occurred before the formal beginning of the narrative and which is reported by Margaret to Mrs Munt. Mrs Wilcox is seen in this chapter in her bedroom, 'sitting up in bed'. We shall learn later that she was mortally ill. But that information is deliberately withheld at this stage. The bedroom scene provides the right setting for Mrs Wilcox here :

The light of the fire, the light from the window, and the light of a candle-lamp, which threw a quivering halo round her hands, combined to create a strange atmosphere of dissolution. (78)

Such lights produce a chiaroscuro effect, and Mrs Wilcox is 'the shadowy woman' of the novel (94).

... there was a long pause—a pause that was somehow akin to the flicker of the fire, the quiver of the reading-lamp upon their hands, the white blur from the window ; a pause of shifting and eternal shadows. (83)

'Indeed, you put the difficulties of life splendidly', said Mrs Wilcox, withdrawing her hand into the deeper shadows. (83)

There are subtle hints that the silences of Mrs Wilcox—the pauses in her conversation, may be more meaningful than her words, which are not many in any case. We find the following sentences with Mrs Wilcox as the subject (—the grammatical subject or the implied subject) :

1. Mrs Wilcox bowed gravely. (78)
2. Mrs Wilcox did not answer. (78)
3. 'That's a most difficult question', said Mrs Wilcox, smiling... (79)
4. 'She gone as well', murmured the other. (79)
5. 'There's nothing to be gained by discussing that', said Mrs Wilcox after a moment's pause. (79)
6. Mrs Wilcox smiled. (83)
7. She repeated : 'An instinct which may be wrong'. (79)

The words 'silence', 'pause', 'smile' and the verb 'murmured' are important indicators.

The omniscient narrator does not tell us anything about Mrs Wilcox's thoughts. The few explicit statements about the thoughts in Mrs Wilcox's mind are almost always qualified by 'perhaps', and the narrator quite deliberately forsakes the 'omniscient' position in :

All this is speculation. Mrs Wilcox has left few clear indications behind her. (75)

The contrast between Margaret and Mrs Wilcox is finally clinched in the last two paragraphs of Chapter VIII ; the contrast is one of age and youth ; Mrs Wilcox reminds Margaret that she is only a 'girl' whereas herself is fifty-one ; Margaret, however, is 'startled' and a 'little annoyed' and says, 'that's not so wildly girlish'.

In Chapter IX the contrast is made even sharper. The luncheon party that Margaret gave in Mrs Wilcox's honour was not a success :

..... the atmosphere was one of polite bewilderment. Her tastes were simple, her knowledge of culture slight, and she was not interested in the New English Art Club, nor in the dividing line between Journalism and Literature, which was started as a conversational hare. The delightful people darted after it with cries of joy, Margaret leading them, and not till the meal was half over did they realize that the principal guest had taken no part in the chase. Clever talk alarmed her, and withered her delicate imaginings ; it was the social counterpart of a motorcar, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower. (84)

Margaret was possessed by 'the demon of vociferation' (84), and later admitted that they led the lives of 'gibbering monkeys' (88).

In Chapter X Mrs Wilcox and Margaret go out for Christmas shopping ; and during their last meeting Mrs Wilcox asks Margaret 'vehemently' (93), to visit Howards End on the same day. Mrs Wilcox was also 'vehement' (92), as she heard from Margaret that she is to be 'parted' from her house. Margaret refused her invitation, at first, and Mrs Wilcox 'was silenced' (94). A few hours later Margaret realised her blunder and set out for the place. She understood that 'this shadowy woman would never ask her again' (94) and took this decision. But she was deterred from actually visiting the place until towards the end of the novel.



Margaret's vivacity, then, is judged by the contrasted quiet of Mrs Wilcox. We may now consider Margaret as she appears at the end of the novel, in Chapter XLIV. The scene is not described by the narrator but presented. Margaret and Helen are sitting in the garden at Howards End. Helen opens the conversation with a question.

Once again we select sentences which contain significant verbs with Margaret as the subject :

1. Margaret put down her work and regarded them absently. (325)
2. 'I haven't the least notion', answered Margaret and took up her work again. (325)
3. 'That child is a wonderful nursemaid', remarked Margaret. (325)
4. Margaret, who was growing less talkative, made no answer. (326)
5. Margaret did not answer. (326)
6. She lowered her eyes a moment to the black abyss of the past. (326)
7. Margaret never stopped working. (327)
8. Margaret silenced her. She said... (327)
9. Margaret did not reply. (328)
10. Margaret knew that her sister spoke truly. (329)
11. Margaret rose, to encounter a man with a heavy black moustache. (329)
12. She took her work and followed him. (330)
13. Mrs Wilcox gave a little cry of annoyance. (330)
14. They (Margaret and Helen) turned and looked at it. (329)
15. She did not like anything scratched. (330)
16. Margaret joined the family without speaking. (330)
17. She knew quite well what was going to be said. (330)
18. Averse to wasting time, she went on sewing. (330)
19. Margaret did not answer. (331)
20. Margaret saw their visitors to the gate. (332)
21. Then she returned to her husband and laid her head in his hands. (332)
22. Margaret was silent. (332)
23. She shivered. (332)

We see that Margaret gradually sheds her restlessness; the continual and somewhat jerky movements of her body and mind slow down and she grows quiet.

The verb 'murmured' which we considered to be a characteristic for Mrs Wilcox is used with Margaret as the subject on at least four different occasions after Mrs Wilcox's death.

1. 'Bag it by all means', murmured Margaret, putting down her work. (121)
2. 'I hadn't thought of that', murmured Margaret, ... (140)
3. 'Poor fellow'! murmured Margaret, looking out to sea, and not understanding. (181)
4. 'Yes, I'm practical', she murmured, stooping over the mowing-machine and playing with the grass which trickled through her fingers like sand. (245)

The Margaret of the early part of the novel did not, could not 'murmur'. Mrs Wilcox murmured; the tree, the wych-elm would rustle (306); the river 'murmurs' as Helen and Leonard read the note sent by Margaret at the end of Chapter XXVII (237); and at the end of Chapter XXVIII Margaret falls asleep 'lulled by the murmurs of the river' (241). There is also a reference to the 'whisper' of the rising tide (135) and in Chapter XIX Margaret 'whispered' that she had had a proposal of marriage from Mr Wilcox. (174) The word 'murmur' is associated with peace, as for instance in the following passage:

The peace of the country was entering into her. It has no commerce with memory, and little with hope.... It is the peace of the present, which passes understanding. Its murmur came 'now', and 'now' once more as they trod the gravel, and 'now' as the moonlight fell upon their father's sword. (307)

In this context, the words 'tranquil', 'tranquillity', and 'tranquilly' accrete additional significance. These words occur in the later part of the novel. For instance, in Chapter XXXIII, Margaret, while waiting at the farm before she enters Howards End for the second time, is meditating on the English farm. Her thoughts are 'tranquillizing', but Margaret cannot yet bear to be 'tranquil' —

But her thoughts were interrupted by the return of Miss Avery's niece, and were so tranquillizing that she suffered the interruption gladly. (264)

Tranquillity, however, as is to be expected, prevails in the last chapter:

1. The air was tranquil now. (326)
2. They were building up a new life, obscure, yet gilded with tranquillity. (326)
3. (Margaret speaking): But everything is peaceful now; I seem cured. (327)
4. Tranquilly he (Henry) replied... (332)



more than Mrs Wilcox who withdraws in tacit disapprobation of its triviality... Mrs Ruth Wilcox does not develop; her character is 'framed'; as Henry reads her character — after her death, she was a woman of 'unvarying virtue' (99), 'she had been a *good* woman' — 'she had been steady' (100). Helen describes her '*steady*' unselfishness in her second letter (21) to Margaret. From time to time Forster professes bewilderment over her attitudes, attempts to throw light on her inner life, describes her as 'shadowy woman' (94) and presents her as a mysterious woman: for instance, he refers to the 'strange atmosphere of dissolution' (78), 'The last words had an indescribable ring about them' (82), or 'then the curious note was struck again' (82), or, 'with each word she spoke the outlines of known things grew dim' (88).

Veritably, 'Mrs Wilcox has left few *clear* indications behind her' (75) and remains, irrevocably, a 'flat' character.

Margaret Schlegel who gradually becomes Mrs Wilcox by the end of the novel, is a 'round' character, as demonstrated by the indicators; and the death of Mrs Wilcox, a turning point in action, 'had helped Margaret in her work. She saw a little more clearly than hitherto what a human being is, and to what he may aspire. Truer relationships gleamed' (111, 206). These lines anticipate her gradual attainment of serenity as well as account for her subsequent acceptance of Henry Wilcox's proposal leading to the peripeteia in her life.

### 3. Meditation

The third device used by Forster for creating the character of Margaret, is a series of passages presenting Margaret's meditations. Margaret is the sentient centre of the novel, and it is a requirement of her functions that she should meditate and the reader share her meditations. It is perhaps a truism that the main character or the sentient centre of any serious novel must meditate. It is through the meditation, the 'interior discourse', 'the internal monologue', that a character becomes a sentient centre and a sympathetic character.

John Halperin, in his recent book entitled *The Language of*

*Meditation*, analysed a number of such meditation passages from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda*, *The Egoist*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Golden Bowl*. Halperin's main concern was with 'the way in which the four authors (Jane Austen, George Eliot, George Meredith, and Henry James) conceive of the epistemological process requisite in the course of their protagonists' "education", an education in the art of moral vision'.<sup>5</sup> In the meditation scene — a scene devoid of dialogue or any physical action — what is always dramatically represented is the climax, of 'education', of self-discovery. He suggested that an answer to the question, 'How, according to the author, does the human mind work?' has to be sought in the 'narrative language' used by the author.<sup>6</sup> This language, however, is a product of four consciousnesses — four simultaneous levels of consciousness — those of the reader, the author, the narrator, and the fictional personage — whose thoughts are under scrutiny.<sup>7</sup>

Much of Halperin's book was an attempt to analyse the meanings of various passages which deal in depth with the consciousness of the respective protagonists and the narrative structure within which the consciousnesses are examined. Halperin concludes that Jane Austen's language is unfigurative, her interior monologues lack one ingredient — metaphor, whereas George Eliot's narrator is less self-effacing. Again, James's Isabel thinks less in terms of abstract generalizations than in terms of mental pictures, and James's style is both metaphorical and indirect.<sup>8</sup>

Halperin is mainly concerned with those meditation passages where the heroine undergoes a change — 'self-discovery', 'turning point'. Margaret's meditations, however, are not of this kind. Her self-discovery does not occur all on a sudden, in a crisis. She grows; the development is a gradual process, she starts with self-criticism, realises that the objective world is not rigid, it is a world of flux, and she turns from innocence to knowledge in the sense that she realises how difficult it is 'to connect'. Accordingly, her meditations vary in quality and tone.

There are about eighteen passages in the novel, which may at first sight be described as 'Meditations of Margaret'. These passages are significant for the following reasons :

(i) The development of Margaret from Miss Schlegel to Mrs Wilcox is a long process and her meditation passages demonstrate through an effective manipulation of the variables in language how she moves from an 'unreliable sentient centre' to a 'reliable' sentient centre.

(ii) The intermittent coalescence of the narrator's voice with Margaret's, in these passages, should be regarded as a deliberate stylistic device. The glide from the mind of Margaret to the mind of the narrator is so imperceptible at times that it would seem that Forster took care to blend the two voices. At times there is a total effacement of the boundaries between their respective worlds, and even the phrases used by the narrator pass almost unobtrusively into the meditative syndrome of the character. Forster is often moving out of the fictive world quite deliberately. There is a deliberate mixing of tones; he is manipulating distance; there is, at times, the intrusive voice of the narrator, resulting in a very little distance between the narrator and the author. The distance between Margaret's voice and the narrator's voice is shortened quite often. As a result, Forster's own voice often mingles with Margaret's, or is present in separate sentences within the same paragraph. This may be labelled a 'sympathetic mode' as Chatman<sup>9</sup> describes it in connexion with Virginia Woolf's opening sentence in *Mrs Dalloway*. Initially, one should make a fine distinction between the author and the narrator. The speaker of a literary work can never be identified with the author; Chatman refers to Katherine Tillotson's view that the narrator is a method rather than a person and also to Wayne C. Booth's 'implied author' who is a construction or reconstruction by the reader. Chatman rejects Stanzel's theory which reduces the narrative situation to three types — 'authorial', 'first-person' and 'figural' and points out the latent difficulties in Stanzel's system.

In fact, the technique of direct free style is quite different from sustained indirect free style, where the effect is more often one of sympathy or identity of view between character and narrator; in Margaret's meditation passages the narrator and the character are so close, in such sympathy, that it is difficult to attribute the speech and to distinguish between the two voices.

Dorit Cohn<sup>10</sup> observes on the sense of intimacy between the narrator and character in the sympathy of the indirect free style:

By allowing the same tense to describe the individual's view of reality and that reality itself, inner and outer world become one, eliminating explicit distance between the narrator and his creature. Two linguistic levels, inner speech with its idiosyncrasy and author's report with its quasi-objectivity, become fused into one, so that the same current seems to pass through narrating and figural consciousness.

In this manner, Forster makes use of indirect free style as a device for indicating the speech and thinking of characters in partially unmediated narratives. This 'sympathetic mode', we venture to suggest, is a linguistic and stylistic evidence supporting the judgment that Margaret is the central consciousness of the novel and Forster wanted the readers to accept Margaret's values.

(iii) Therefore, despite sporadic authorial asides and commentaries, as the action proceeds, gradually Margaret's point-of-view takes over and the Wilcoxes are subservient to Margaret's evaluation and to the subsequent developments in her attitude affected and conditioned by Mrs Wilcox and Helen Schlegel.

(iv) The frequent dis-appearance of the third-person pronoun and the partial synchronization and co-presence of the two voices (Margaret's and narrator's) in these passages — engender an irony of presentation. Forster's irony is not purely verbal; it results from the narrative texture of his novels. It may better be described as the irony of withdrawal which is deliberately deployed as a stylistic device and which occurs only when the narrative voice stops emanating from a position posterior to the consciousness of the character.

Four passages, however, may be selected which are *not* in the nature of the narrator's report about what Margaret thought with the narrator's elucidations. These may be considered as 'meditation passages' where the character is engaged in active thinking and subsequently undergoes a definite change of feelings and attitude.

The first two passages are from Chapter X. Chapter X is important because here Mrs Wilcox is seen to establish communion with Margaret by sending her a message asking her to come shopping for Christmas. Forster takes care to state their acquaintance 'was singular rather than intimate' (90).

1. 'Yes, do you, yes, much easier', replied Margaret, but felt the grotesque impact of the unseen upon the seen, and saw issuing from a

forgotten manger at Bethlehem this torrent of coins and toys. Vulgarly reigned. Public-houses, besides their exhortation against temperance reform, invited men to 'Join Our Christmas goose club'—one bottle of gin, etc., or two, according to subscription. A poster of a woman in tights heralded the Christmas pantomime, and little red devils, who had come in again that year, were prevalent upon the Christmas cards. Margaret was no morbid idealist. She did not wish this spate of business and self-advertisement checked. It was only the occasion of it that struck her with amazement annually. How many of these vacillating shoppers and tired shop-assistants' realized that it was a divine event that drew them together? She realized it, though standing outside in the matter. She was not a Christian in the accepted sense; she did not believe that God had ever worked among us as a young artisan. These people, or most of them, believed it, and, if pressed, would affirm it in words. But the visible signs of their belief were Regent Street or Drury Lane, a little mud displaced, a little money spent, a little food cooked, eaten and forgotten. Inadequate. But in public who shall express the unseen adequately? It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity; personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision (90-91).

Margaret admits that she has odd ideas about Christmas (90) and her reflections on the ceremony in this passage are positively cynical. She feels the 'grotesque' impingement of 'the unseen' upon the 'seen', condemns the reign of 'vulgarity', and realizes the essential 'inadequacy' of it all. She views the effect of 'the unseen' in a captious, sophisticated manner and sees through the revelry and carousal of the public who reduce the solemn religious ritual to 'a torrent of coins and toys' and 'a spate of business and self-advertisement'. The 'vacillating shopkeepers' and 'tired shop-assistants' immersed in this spate, fail to realise the true import and sanctity of the 'divine event' and Margaret feels that this hectic quest for superficial, material pleasures like spending money, buying gifts, and cooking and eating food — is trivial as well as ludicrous. The use of lexical items like 'forgotten manger' (90) and the juxtaposition of 'coins and toys' (91), the concatenation of 'mud, money and food' (91) further highlight her supercilious attitude to the ceremony. Her remarks on 'public houses' and 'the poster of a woman in tights' and 'little red devils' are also cynical.

The point, however, is that 'She realized it'; even standing on the periphery of the ignorant world she can see through the trappings and feel the extreme need of 'personal intercourse', 'private life'



which alone can 'hold out the mirror to infinity' and can 'hint at a personality beyond our daily vision'. The personality of Mrs Wilcox can transcend her 'daily vision' and can vouchsafe her world of 'the unseen'.

The use of deictics confirm the character's voice and the thoughts are refracted through the centre of consciousness except in the sentences ; 'Margaret was no morbid idealist. She did not wish this spate of business and self-advertisement checked' (91). These sentences alternate the predominant note of cynicism in Margaret's meditations. Forster has already suggested Margaret's cynical attitude to Christmas revelry, but at this point rather abruptly he seems to withdraw this supercilious tone and veer towards a more generalized comment ; 'It was only the occasion of it that struck her with amazement annually--' ; 'amazement'—is an inadequate noun-phrase for it is transparent that Margaret is not struck with sheer 'amazement' but with more complex feelings which are vitally related to the development of her character.

Thus, this passage is deliberately intended to be more than Margaret's meditations on Christmas, for it reveals Margaret's belief in the 'inner life', 'private life' and 'personal relationships' as well as foreshadows her subsequent awareness of Mrs Wilcox's personality capable of 'holding out a mirror to infinity'.

2. Margaret nearly spoke a dozen times, but something throttled her. She felt petty and awkward, and her meditations on Christmas grew more cynical. Peace ? It may bring other gifts, but is there a single Londoner to whom Christmas is peaceful ? The craving for excitement and for elaboration has ruined that blessing. Goodwill ? Had she seen any example of it in the hordes of purchasers ? Or in herself ? She had failed to respond to this invitation merely because it was a little queer and imaginative—she, whose birthright it was to nourish imagination ! Better to have accepted, to have tired themselves a little by the journey, than coldly to reply, 'Might I come some other day ?' Her cynicism left her. There would be no other day. This shadowy woman would never ask her again (94)

Here is another important meditation passage which gives us an insight into Mrs Wilcox's character through the centre of consciousness. Margaret suddenly acquires a certainty about how Mrs Wilcox would behave and gains in her perception of Mrs Wilcox's character. At first she declines the invitation to visit Howard's End,

and makes an utmost but abortive effort to explicate her feelings. She 'fails to respond' and consequently feels 'petty and awkward'; with her negative feelings, the meditations on Christmas, 'grow more cynical.' She condemns herself as she scrutinizes her own feelings and fails to find Peace, Goodwill or Blessing even in her ownself; while groping for legitimate reasons behind her refusal to accept the invitation, she is, as it were, ashamed of her own decision. She regrets her inadequacy of understanding, denounces her own self and realises her error of judgment. She also realises that an instant acceptance of Mrs Wilcox's invitation to visit Howards End on the same day, would secure her these values which she wanted to foster but failed in the 'craving for excitement and elaboration'. The invitation was 'queer' and 'imaginative', and it is strange that she 'whose birthright it was to nourish imagination' (43), refused it. The moment she realised it and acquired an insight into Mrs Wilcox's character, her cynicism disappeared. Mrs Wilcox is referred to here as a 'shadowy' woman but Margaret discerned that this woman had one passion in her life—her house, and the moment was solemn when she invited a friend to share this passion with her. 'To answer "another day" was to answer as a fool' (95) for the house was not just 'brick and mortar' but the 'Holy of Holies' and ultimately 'Imagination triumphed' (95) and Margaret decided to go on the same day.

Two other meditation passages occur in Chapter XXVIII of the novel. This chapter is also mainly about Margaret and it records the development of her feeling immediately after knowing Henry's past.

3. Then the sense of his degradation choked her. Was he worth all this bother? To have yielded to a woman of that sort was everything, yes, it was, and she could not be his wife. She tried to translate his temptation into her own language, and her brain reeled. Men must be different, even to want to yield to such a temptation. Her belief in comradeship was stifled, and she saw life as from that glass saloon on the Great Western, which sheltered male and female alike from the fresh air. Are the sexes really races, each with its own code of morality, and their mutual love a mere device of Nature's to keep things going? Strip human intercourse of the proprieties and is it reduced to this? Her judgment told her so. She knew that out of Nature's device we have built a magic that will win us immortality. (238).

This passage marks a turning point, an important phase in the process of her development, a crucial moment of transition from a simple to a complex awareness of life and code of morality. With

the revelation of Henry's lurid past her belief in comradeship is completely shattered. The reference to 'the glass saloon on the Great Western' harks back to a similar idea expressed in Chapter XXI where Forster as commentator stated that for Margaret 'the long glass saloon.....became a forcing house for the idea of sex'. The word 'magic' (238) has ironical undertones because Margaret seems to feel the inadequacy of reason and logic in these matters which 'Science cannot measure and Theology dares not contemplate'; 'mutual love' and 'human intercourse', divested of the proprieties, are reduced to 'a mere device of Nature's to keep things going'. It is interesting to note that 'She knew that'... and again 'Margaret knew all this' (238). In a deeply perturbed state of mind she wrestled with this awareness but 'could not feel it' (238). A subterranean note of disapprobation is implicit in the idea of building a 'magic out of Nature's devices and the gods granting men immortality, for producing one jewel.

The antonymous lexical pattern evident in the use of such words as 'mutual love', 'comradeship' and 'tenderness' as opposed to 'a mere device of Nature's to keep things going', or 'a magic for winning us immortality' (238),—brings out the polarities which Margaret fails to connect at this stage.

4. And yet— what would an explanation tell her? A date, a place, a few details, which she could imagine all too clearly. Now that the first shock was over, she saw that there was every reason to premise a Mrs Bast. Henry's inner life had long lain open to her— his intellectual confusion, his obtuseness to personal influence, his strong but furtive passions. Should she refuse him because his outer life corresponded? Perhaps. Perhaps, if the dishonour had been done to her, but it was done long before her day. She struggled against the feeling. She told herself that Mrs Wilcox's wrong was her own. But she was not a barren theorist; As she undressed, her anger, her regard for the dead, her desire for a scene, all grew weak. Henry must have it as he liked, for she loved him, and some day she would use her love to make him a better man. (240)

This meditation passage should be read as a continuation of the preceding one. After the discovery of the past liaison between Henry and Mrs Bast, Margaret received a veritable shock. She had expected an explanation from Henry which had not yet been given to her. She went upstairs in an uncertain state of mind. This passage presents a definite change in Margaret's mind; at the end of the passage Margaret is no longer considering an explanation necessary.

After the abatement of the initial shock she sees through Henry's inner life, and she detects his 'intellectual confusion', his 'obtuseness' and his strong but clandestine passions. She struggles against her feelings as to whether to refuse him on this ground. But the narrator's voice states that 'she was not a barren theorist' and the change occurs in the following sentence: 'As she undressed ..... all grew weak'. The weight of this change is indicated by the weight of the sentence structure. There are jerky, one-dimensional, linear sentences, questions followed by hypotactic, involved, spiral-like sentences. The weight is also built up by the succession of the phrases—her anger, her regard for the dead, her desire for a scene—which indicate the variegated spectrum of her emotions—her resentment, her respect for Mrs Wilcox and her dormant desire for a dramatic outburst. Ultimately, however, all 'grows weak' and she still hopes to connect Henry's 'inner life' and 'outer life' by 'using her love'. The authorial comment summing up the process of meditation—'... and some day ..... man'—engenders a peculiar kind of irony. The irony can be located in the verb 'use her love' (to make him a better man) which makes the reader ponder over one of the most quintessential questions in the novel as to whether love can be *used* for the purpose of cementing the rainbow bridge, for connecting the polar opposites. For it has already been stated that 'Henry is an elderly man now and it would be futile and impudent to correct him' (Chapter XVIII, 170), and in Margaret's case, according to the author 'love must confirm an old relation than reveal a new one' (179). In the concluding line there is a subtle and oblique insinuation that it is not only hard for Margaret 'to go in the roads of Mr Wilcox's soul' (187) but it is also futile to hope that she will succeed in connecting the 'beast' and 'the monk'.

Thus, the style of these meditations, is rather remarkable in its variety and complexity, for the narrator seems to be influenced in his language, vocabulary and syntax by the texture of the thoughts he is communicating to the reader and thus, while the voice we hear is probably that of the narrator, it is also obvious that he is reporting to us the thoughts of Margaret as he perceives them, using his mind as a mirror, thus bringing the two minds into a sort of partial coincidence and thus engendering a kind of irony—quite characteristic of Forsterian prose.

The novel presents Margaret Schlegel as gradually acquiring the position of a reliable sentient centre, through a series of self-assessments. One may recall here that implicit in Booth's discussion of unreliable narrators, is the assumption that he is dealing with narrators who are characters in the stories they tell, not disembodied narrative voices<sup>11</sup>. According to Booth, there are two distinct kinds of unreliable narrators though the range of possible variations within each type is virtually unlimited. On the one hand, there are narrators who are deliberately deceptive; on the other, there are those who are mistaken. Forster's narrative, at times, seems to be a collection of inconsistent and contradictory tones. The narrator's presence is perceptible not by virtue of the narrative voice, but by the total narrative control through which the novel creates the implied author who can manipulate the narrative voice, making it consistent as he sees appropriate.

... ..

A tentative resolution of the conflict between the human social reality and transcendental reality, is achieved in the novel by Margaret, the spokesman of liberal humanist values; the epigraph 'Only Connect' provides her with a motto. She perpetually hopes to build a rainbow bridge by connecting 'the prose and the passion', 'the beast' and 'the monk' in us. Initially, her attempts to connect fail; she fails with Mrs Wilcox three times: — she reacts strongly to Mrs Wilcox's visit, writes a wrong kind of letter, which is repaired by a prompt, apologetic visit. Her lunch for Mrs Wilcox also fails and is again repaired by apology. She fails to respond to Mrs Wilcox's invitation to accompany her to Howards End; she tries to repair but the visit is deterred by the circumstance of the return of Mr Wilcox and the family. Margaret's friendship with Mrs Wilcox is kept shadowy, as she is not shown visiting Mrs Wilcox in the nursing home.

Even her attempts to connect with Leonard Bast, not only fail, but lead to disaster. And finally, her heroic attempt to connect with Henry Wilcox succeeds by breaking his 'fortress' and the author comments that there was 'something uncanny in her triumph'.

On the basis of stylistic evidence, the story of her 'triumph' not only reveals Margaret as a fully developed, 'round' character but

refutes also the common interpretation of her character merely as Forster's surrogate, a disembodied voice of liberal humanism.<sup>12</sup>

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2. E. M. Forster—*Aspects of the Novel*, 85.  
Margaret does surprise Helen, by accepting Henry Wilcox's proposal (174-75) and the readers by her excited interchange of words with Henry (300-301) and Charles by jumping 'straight out of the car' (212). There is a strand of unpredictability in her nature.
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9. Seymour Chatman—'Structure of Narrative Transmission' in *Style and Structure in Literature*, Ed. Roger Fowler : 255-56.
10. Dorrit Cohn—'Narrative Monologue ; Definition of a Fictional Style', *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 18, (1966), 105.
11. Wayne C. Booth—*Rhetoric of Fiction*, Ch VI (Types of Narration).
12. Forster critics like Montgomery Belgion 'The Diabolism of E. M. Forster': *Criterion*, XIV, 1934, Peter Widdowson 'Howards End : Fiction as History', and McDowell mainly regard Margaret as the repository of Forster's own humanistic ethic.

## VERNON LEE : SOME ASPECTS OF THEORY AND PRACTICAL CRITICISM OF FICTION

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AMITABHA SINHA

### I

THIS is far from a full treatment of the fictional theory and criticism of Vernon Lee (Violet Paget). To give her that treatment requires a wide scope—particularly in view of the almost countless, vivid, new ideas she throws up on fiction, which are to be disentangled from the volubility, incongruities, and absence of fusion of ideas in these writings. This essay, part of an intended, larger effort, is a brief consideration—rather critical summary—of only some of her palpable features.

Vernon Lee's writings on what may be called the 'poetics' of fiction—after she had written variously on Italy, the Renaissance, and art and literature in general, largely under the influence of Walter Pater and the aesthetic movement, and had also written several novels and stories—belong to that significant period of English theory of fiction which began with James, Stevenson, and George Moore in the eighteen eighties. Yet, while she is usually thought of only as a critic of the nineties,<sup>1</sup> it should be noticed that the more important of her theoretical writings, collected together as ten chapters in a volume of 1923 (*The Handling of Words*), cover a wider range of time. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the dates of some of these writings are the mid-nineties, of some others the turn of the century, and of yet some others, say, *circa* 1920-22<sup>2</sup>. This broad time-spectrum, however, does not indicate any very remarkable growth of her thoughts; they remain more or less the same, although some faint development might just be traced. The fact is that, spanning the whole literary period that we associate with the names of James, I. A. Richard, and Eliot, Vernon Lee proliferates in the second decade of this century the sharply revolutionary ideas

which she introduced in the nineties and thereby showed that she wrote ahead of her time.

## II

One all-pervasive theoretical stance runs throughout Vernon Lee's writings on fiction ; that is her concern with the craft of fiction, to which she gives the name "literary construction"—although by "construction" we mean something else :

The craft of the Writer consists ... in manipulating the contents of the Reader's mind ... in construction by his skilful selection of words and sentences ... (p. 1)

Thus Vernon Lee gives her own interpretation to the craft of fiction—although to my mind technique would perhaps be a better word for what she means : it is the organization of the novelist's as well as the reader's experiences. Obviously, by giving a psychological orientation to the idea of craft and involving the writer-audience relationship in it, the attitude implies the necessity of the verbal organization of responses to life as one of the central features of prose, especially of prose fiction; this indeed serves as a good starting-point for the understanding of all her theories of fiction.

## III

The point, however, is : what actually are the ingredients of craft ? One of the chief ingredients, according to Vernon Lee, is the point of view, "the supreme constructive question in the novel" ("On Literary Construction", p. 20). Along with James, and even somewhat before James, she is a pioneer in the field of the theory of the point of view, as critics have pointed out, and the key-passage where it occurs has been extensively quoted and briefly commented upon by Kenneth Graham and also by John Halperin<sup>3</sup>. Some more things may as well be said about Vernon Lee's approach to the subject. The way in which she distinguishes between three different kinds of point of view reminds one of Lubbock ; the "no particular body's" or "nobody's point of view" ; "the point of view of one of the other persons" ; and "the point of view of the analytical, judicious author" (*ibid.*). The distinction is fairly acceptable, the first of these corresponding with what Lubbock describes as scene,



the second with the Jamesian "centre of consciousness", and the third with the omniscient author convention.

There are some small inconsistencies, though: she thinks that the "nobody's point of view" suits sensational and children's stories, but it is not necessarily so; thus, for instance, in a good many stories by Sheridan Le Fanu or in some by Vernon Lee herself (e.g., in her collection of stories, *Hauntings*, 1890), we find the use of dramatized narration. Also, the instances she gives of the "nobody's point of view" (e.g., *Cinderella*; the *Decameron*) are usually written from the point of view of the omniscient author, sometimes mixed with other points of view. Then again, she does not think much of the retrospective first-person point of view (e.g., pp. 12-3)—although she might have implied it under "one of the other persons" (but, in that case, she is not very clear about it). While she thinks the omniscient "straight forward narrative" is "perfect" (p. 13), she seems to be inclined towards the Jamesian subjective point of view, "but once you get a psychological interest ... the point of view becomes inevitable ..." (p. 21). Indeed, she goes further and on a later occasion draws attention to the significant relationship between impressionism and this point of view, "all impressionism, literary as much as pictorial, depends upon a fixed point of view" ("The Handling of Words", p. 211)—no doubt correctly so.

#### IV

Vernon Lee's idea of the craft of fiction accommodates also another, and rather interesting, notion, that of "patterns" (not in Forster's sense; note the plural) which in its turn is related to that of the organic unity of fiction. Typically, she links this up with the function of memory and to the function of words. After saying that "the construction of a whole book stands to the construction of a single sentence" in the same relation as the intricacies of orchestral music stands to a single note ("On Style", p. 65), she develops it later on:

... the great Writer or artist ... lives in a way ... more *unified* than the rest of us ... And hence he can compel our labouring thoughts, our wandering attention, our intermittent feelings, into *patterns* consistent, *self-sufficing*, vigorous, harmonious, *unified*.

("The Nature of the Writer", p. 82; my italics)

Yet again

... the man who thinks and feels in the *concentrated modes of the word* elaborates a logical, coherent, *organic* representation ...

(*ibid.*, p. 83 ; my italics)

The stress on organic unity is very obvious : the writer's *patterns* organize the wandering, chaotic experiences of the readers into a "self-sufficing" unity — an idea typical of an 'organic theory of art and it is interesting to note that Vernon Lee uses the word "organic" here, and twice uses the other word "unified".

On few occasions, however, Vernon Lee thinks of the total novel as an organically unified whole. Usually, she thinks of organic unity in terms of diversified, localized patterns (as I have tried to illustrate in the following sections of my text). Further, she does not illustrate these notions, which might have further strengthened them. Meanwhile, the notions are significant for their literary moorings, too : notwithstanding some Victorian sentimentalities ( "soul can dwell" ; "value of eternity" ; *ibid.* ) in them, and in spite of somewhat unconvincing objections she has to the aesthetics of the novel (in the very brief fourth chapter, "The Aesthetics of the Novel") the aesthetic emphasis is definitely there in these notions, in the sense it is, say, in the theories of I. A. Richards and the New Critics. What is more important is that, like James, she was one of the very few in those days who could think of the novel in terms of organic patterns.

## V

One of the most significant features, if not the most significant, of Vernon Lee is her attitude to the verbal aspects of the novel, which bolsters up our understanding of her actual criticism. The use of words is a great craft to her :

...The Writer's materials are *words*, and those groupings... of words—which we call sentences, paragraphs, and also other groupings such as parenthetical passages, explanations, retrospects, and so forth. The Writer's materials are words, and

it is by arranging these that he copies...his own feeling and ideas. But these words are merely *signals*—visual, audible, tactile, emotional, and of a hundred other sorts...The words are what the Writer manipulates...and behind these words are the contents of the Reader's memory...("On Style", pp. 43-4 ; VL's italics)

The very frequency of the word "word" is remarkable : six times in a fragment of one paragraph. What is important is the interpretation she gives to the word as an image with a symbolic potential : words are signals calling up different sensory associations ; she is more definite when in another context she says that the understanding of language "means simply that certain symbolical sounds or marks awaken in us echoes, images, feelings..." ("The Nature of the Writes, pp. 74-5). To what extent the novel, a sprawling verbal organization, illustrates this symbolical function of words is of course an issue open to debate, although it is unquestionable that it does so at least to some extent and on important narrative occasions. Meanwhile, the theory itself stands not only rather near to the French Symbolistic and the Anglo-American Imagist attitude to language but also to the I. A. Richardsian concept of the "emotive" use of language.

There is one drawback to this theory. Vernon Lee limits the word-groupings—craft to her—to localized structures (lines, paragraphs, etc.), indeed sometimes to the word-in itself "like a composite paragraph" ("On Style", p. 45), but does not expand them in her theory to cover the total novel, while we know that the novel is one whole verbal as well as non-verbal artefact. The distinction that she draws between word as style and word in actual operation is nevertheless a significant interpretation of its function and sums up her outlook, "...the name of what determines the ultimate essentials of that [the reader's] response ... is STYLE ... But when subjected to analysis, it turns out to be ... nothing but the Handling of Words" ("The Handling of Words", p. 192). And with this she takes us straight to the fiction-criticism.

## VI

The Handling of Words—no doubt a rather happy phrase. Vernon Lee's practical criticism illustrates this concept, inspired,

she says, by a letter to the *Times* suggesting the "statistical test applied to literature" (p. 189). To do so, she examines the verbal texture of six passages from novels by Meredith, Kipling, Stevenson, Hardy, James, and Maurice Hewlett (perhaps the happiest choice possible in her time). The method is quite her own. By sticking to the idea of the statistical test, she selects five hundreds *at random* from each of these works, counts up the number of the different parts of speech, and seeks, through analysis, to come to conclusions.

The method, however, has some drawbacks. For one thing, why does it have to be five hundred words in each passage just for the sake of statistics? A line or two, either more or less, may alter the sense of a passage in a novel. Further—but this is something true of practical criticism of all types—the novel much more than poetry and even drama has by its very nature an uneven texture and pace; therefore such passages should perhaps be deliberately (not "at random", as she says) selected, as, for example, Ian Watt does in his familiar and variously anthologized essay, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*". Then again, she does not make any very significant use of the statistical counting up of the grammatical parts of speech. For all these limitations, however, it should be remembered that Vernon Lee did this long before I. A. Richards made his experiments with poetry and laid the foundations of modern practical criticism (granting the secondary differences between Vernon Lee and Richards—e.g., the naming of the works by her and the anonymity of I. A. Richards's poems; incidentally, had Richards read Vernon Lee?). Anyway, let us now look at a piece of the criticism itself. For my purpose, I shall briefly consider Vernon Lee's analysis of the passage from Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, firstly because it happens to be one of the four most familiar novels examined by her, and secondly because, while the three others—*Harry Richmond*, *Tess*, and *The Ambassadors*—have been subjected to modern sophisticated literary criticism, *Kim* has rarely been given any such treatment.

This is from that scene in the novel, where Kim, after he has gone secretly to the tent of the Mavericks dining at their messtable, is caught by the Rev. Arthur Bennet. Vernon Lee's twelve-and-a-half page discussion of this one page from the novel can be only very

briefly summarized. She first draws attention to the "mechanism of tension and restraint" in Kipling's narration of the dramatic scene through his use of the words in "lastly — and firstly ... this adventure, though he did not know the English word ... this stupendous lark .....", and emphasizes what she calls the "radiating crash of that word *lark*" (p. 203). She follows it up with a reference to the abrupt narrative movement to Kim's bodily movement, praising the device for its vividness yet criticizing it for its "cheapness" (pp. 203-04). Vernon Lee's more important point of criticism is Kipling's mixing up two *planes of thought* — of the sahibs in their tent and Kim; of the priest who trod on him and Kim who flinched under him; and in particular of words like "prayed" (p. 205; Kim thinks so while the soldiers were toasting a mascot or a totem) and "mess-table" (p. 206; to the uninitiated Kim it should have been only a table). The most important of these confusions is for Vernon Lee that of the points of view in the description of the priest clutching Kim, "a long arm shot out and clutched at his neck"; her comment is on the grammar of the point of view here, "now this elision of the man to whom the arm belonged does not go with a point of view. Not Kim's; for to Kim the central occurrence would not be the nominative *arm* ... but a nominative Kim suddenly collared ... " (p. 211).

This analysis, while pointing out some of Kipling's merits, surely indicates a sort of clumsiness in narrative texture that Kipling sometimes displays in his works; one wishes in fact that Kipling had in this scene kept his subject at a slightly greater distance than he does. Yet Vernon Lee makes the mistake of seemingly wistfully wanting the scene to be constructed from Kim's point of view, which would be to miss the point. The scene, as indeed the whole novel, follows the omniscient author convention which perfectly suits its nature, so that the characters and the objects look as they would to a bystander and the *planes of thought* would naturally get mixed up. Moreover, Vernon Lee's criticism would have gained perhaps a better effect if she had noted the frequency of monosyllabic verb-sounds in the active voice, which bring out the sense of dynamic action in the scene, like "stepped"; "flinched"; "choked"; "kicked"; "gasped", "rolled"; and so forth. Further, the analysis of this passage (also of the others) does not tell us anything about the whole

novel. The virtues and limitations of Vernon Lee's criticism are likewise found in those of the five other works to various extents; indeed, one misses in them the integrated working out of the wonderful things that she says in her theories of patterns, points of view, and the signal-like organization of words. Even so, this practical criticism is surely a pioneering work in the field of novel-criticism.

## VII

The above, as I said in the beginning, is only a bare and partial summary of Vernon Lee's theory and criticism of fiction. This, I hope, nevertheless suggests her importance and indicates that as theorist of fiction she leads to Percy Lubbock and as that of literature in general, including fiction, to I. A. Richards and the New Criticism.

One feels that Vernon Lee was a woman who liked not only to follow a creed but also to live it. It is difficult to substantiate this contention, but one notes, following Rene Wellek,<sup>4</sup> first her "aesthetic" preoccupation, then the rebound from it in the middle-eighties — as would be likely from such a total, cloistered preoccupation, then the modified return to it; one also notes the absorption in the same decade in public activities such as feminism, socialism, and pacifism. From all this, one feels that, living life as fully as she could yet seeking to gather from it the features of beauty, she found the novel — which more than any other type of writing fully embraces life — the chief point of her intellectual concern from the nineties onwards. Once she indeed speaks of the "relation ... of writing to life" (p. 302), while she is also interested in "aesthetic construction" (p. 133). The conclusion perhaps is that Vernon Lee sought to reconcile an interest in life with an aesthetic, not necessarily "aesthetic" outlook. To bring about this reconcillation is no easy task — fiction critics of the nineteen sixties, seventies, and eighties have been and still are at it —, and, temperamentally and historically, it was beyond her. Meanwhile, her effort itself, as we may have seen, did remarkable things for fiction-criticism.

# NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Even that formidable scholar, Rene Wellek, says that these studies, "though published late in her life, belong to her early work" (Rene Wellek, "Vernon Lee, Bernard Berenson, and Aesthetics", in *Discriminations, Further Concepts of Criticism*, New Haven & London, 1970, 2nd reprinting 1971, p. 185).
2. The dates would broadly be as follows : "On Literary Construction", ch. I, is of 1895, published in the *Contemporary*, as Kenneth Graham tells us (*English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900*, O. U. P., 1965, p. 135) ; "On Style", ch. II, was, however, published in 1894 in the *New Review* as "The Craft of Words", considering a musical metaphor used in it and ascribed by Graham to it (*ibid.*, n 1) ; the sense of immediacy in the innumerable references to aestheticism in "The Aesthetics of the Novel" and "The Nature of the Writer", the third the fourth chapters. respectively, surely place them yet in the nineties.  
"The Handling of Words", the sixth chapter, is obviously an early-twentieth century piece, since it deals with *Kim* (1901) and *The Ambassadors* (1903) ; so is "Studies in Literary Psychology", the fifth chapter, which follows the same pattern of critical methods as the sixth. The date of the seventh chapter is *circa* 1922, from its sub-title "Apropos of Mr. Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction*, since Lubbock's book was first published in 1921 ; the opening lines of ch. VIII, "Can Writing be Taught ?" place it pat in 1922 : "A quarter of a century and more ago, as I had ended a lecture on Literary Construction" (*The Handling of Words*, London, John Lane, 1923, p. 287 ; the page-references in my text below are to this edition of the volume). The last chapter, the "conclusion", is dated in the volume as August, 1922 ; the same year or thereabouts should therefore be the date of the ninth chapter, "What Writers Might Learn".
3. See Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-37 and John Halperin, "The Theory of the Novel: A Critical Introduction" in John Halparin ed. *The Theory of the Novel*, O. U. P., 1977, pp. 15-7.
4. Wellek, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-70.

## 'DEATH BE NOT PROUD ...' : AN EXPLICATION

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DEBBIR BIKRAM DASGUPTA

THE principal object of this short paper is to offer a critical reading of Donne's Holy Sonnet 'Death be not proud...'¹, a poem more often admired than explicated. But no poem (or for that matter, no work of art) exists in vacuum. The Holy Sonnets, as Martz's seminal and exhaustive study² demonstrates, have as their organizing principle the tradition of formal meditation, more specifically meditation on death and judgement. I shall briefly mention only the elements constituting the meditative structure and then go on to suggest that the tradition alone does not fully explain Donne's preoccupation with death in his secular and divine poetry. I shall deal with this aspect in somewhat greater detail because of its greater relevance to the poem under discussion.

The Holy Sonnets have generally been read as an illustration of a particular theological doctrine. Douglas Peterson³, for example, reads them in the light of the Anglican doctrine of Contrition. Holy Sonnet 6 is for him a transitional poem in the scheme of contrition, anticipating "the transcendence of fear through love". Wilbur Sanders⁴ goes to the other extreme: he detects a "certain shallow assurance", "doctrinal gymnastics", "an annoying contradiction of feeling", and finds them "radically irreligious". My intention is modest: a detailed analysis to demonstrate that this sonnet is not confined to doctrinal hair-splitting and that it displays a remarkable artistic and technical skill in its organization.

### II

Both Martz and Gardner in her *Introduction* demonstrate how Donne, among other seventeenth century writers, draws upon the distinctive qualities of formal meditation as a "way of thinking, a method of prayer" (Gardner, p. liv). Both highlight the influence of St. Ignatius Loyola's *Exercitia Spirituality* on Donne's meditation on the



Last Things From the chaotic mass of confusing meanings attached to the term "meditation", Martz isolates the definition produced by St. François de Sales, a follower of St. Ignatius Loyola: '...meditation is an attentive thought iterated, or voluntarily-intertained in the mynde, to excitate the will to holy affections and resolutions' (p. 15). Its aim is to stimulate devotion—to rejoice 'in doing our dutie towards God and man' (p. 15).

All the important treatises on meditation are remarkably similar in fundamental procedure, a similarity largely due to the influence of the Ignatian pattern. It is a pattern employing the three powers of the mind—'Memory, Understanding, and Will'—with a regular sequence of beginning, middle, and end; a brief, preparatory prayer for grace, two 'preludes' (employing memory), meditation proper divided into three or five 'points' (understanding) followed by 'colloquies' (will) in which the soul expresses to God its 'affections, resolutions, thanksgivings, and petitions' (p. 27).

Since the end of all knowledge in meditation is the knowledge of God, self-scrutiny, says St. Bernard in *The Degrees of Humility and Pride*, is the first step in the quest for truth. It is in this sense that self-examination, though not proper meditation, is inseparably related to it. And of all the modes of self-knowledge, the meditation on the Last Things was the most widely cultivated. This has a direct bearing upon the theme of the first sequence (Sonnets 1-6) of the Holy Sonnets where Donne, while using the pattern, develops his material in his own individual manner.

### III

The tradition however provides only a partial answer. Further explanation must be sought elsewhere—in Donne's own temperament and character. His preoccupation with death and decay was as much the product of the Jacobean zeitgeist as of the privation and insecurity he suffered after marriage. The *Songs and Sonets*, for all its protestations of love as a self-contained world making 'one little room, an everywhere', cannot blur the note of mortality. *The Relique* and *The Expiration* both link death with love and in *A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day* the speaker, through the death of his beloved woman, becomes the 'first nothing, the elixir grown'.

The two *Anniversary* poems also point to Donne's inner world. While the first poem finds in the dead Elizabeth Drury the emblem of the 'frailty and the decay of this whole world', the second traces the pattern of 'Contemplation of our state in our deathbed'. That Donne's pessimism and melancholy are not assumed to impress a rich patron is confirmed by his letters over the preceding years. They frequently reflect his morbid depression and death wish.

The prose works too corroborate this obsession with mortality ; *Biathanatos*, a treatise in defence of suicide, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* and, above all, the *Sermons*. In his own macabre judgement, Donne becomes a symbolic figure, representing in his own person both the morally festered state of man and the steadily decaying condition of the natural world. In Meditation II, he presents the spectacle of a man absorbed in visualizing his own approach to physical dissolution. 'Man, who is the noblest part of the earth' he writes, 'melts so away as if he were a statue not of earth but of snow . it doth not only melt him but calcine him, reduce him to atoms and to ashes ; not to water but to lime'<sup>6</sup>. The tolling of a bell for another man, less fortunate than him, brings Donne to recognize in meditation XVIII that he too must be looked upon as dead, using as he does the startling paradox of himself as a living corpse : 'I am dead, I was born dead ; and from the first laying of these mud walls in my conception they have mouldered away, and the whole course of life is but an active death'<sup>6</sup>.

This obsessive concern reaches its climax in the *Sermons* which reflect a mesmerized contemplation of what both appeals and appals. For Donne birth, suffering and death are so united that he sees the child's coming headfirst from the mother's womb a prefiguring of that 'headlong falling into calamities which it must suffer after'. Physical decay and dissolution continued to haunt him to the end of his final sermon, published posthumously as *Death's Duell*. The womb becomes a prefiguring of the grave, birth a prefiguring of death, 'delivering over to another death, the manifold deaths of this world. We have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception. and wee come into the world, wound up in that winding sheete, for wee come to seeke a grave'<sup>7</sup>. A little later, he states more emphatically : 'For us that die now and sleepe in the state of the dead, wee

must al passe this posthume death, this death after death, nay this death after buriall, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrification, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave...This is the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that wee can consider'<sup>8</sup>.

Though death had its terrifying fascination for Donne (witness his last paradoxical act of portraying himself as a corpse-like figure within a knotted shroud), he was not cowed by its terror. He was so far from fearing death in his last illness, he told his physician, 'which to others is the king of terrors, that he longed for the day of his dissolution'. Death as liberation is another theme expounded in the sermons, one of which I will refer to in my analysis.

#### IV

'Death be not proud ...', a poem on the "death of Death at the resurrection of the just" (Gardner, p. xii), concludes the sequence of meditation on the Last Things. The preceding sonnets, charged with an intense dramatic immediacy and deliberately evoking a sense of fear and horror of judgement, conform to the usual Donne mode. Holy Sonnet 6 dismisses the last enemy with an unruffled, solemn majesty, and recalls Herbert's *Death* where, from being 'once an uncouth hideous thing', it is 'grown fair and full of grace' by virtue of Christ's sacrifice in expiation for the sins of mankind. Like Herbert, Donne here looks upon death as the gateway to a greater life beyond the grave. Since life in this world is an 'eternity of dying', an 'eternal dying, and not dead', physical death is but the prelude to spiritual life. Donne could have appropriately repeated, as a commentary on the faith of the just, the dying words of Mary Stuart: 'en ma fin est mon commencement'. He dismisses death as a motive of fear. Fear of death, a 'natural fear', is transcended by the 'feare of the Lord': 'when the feare of the Lord is entered into my naturall feare, my feare is more conversant, more exercised upon...the glory of God...than upon the afflictions of this life, how malignant. how manifold soever'<sup>9</sup>. Structurally, the poem falls into four sections, constituting a point-by-point refutation of death's claim as the destroyer: lines 1-4, a rejection of the grounds for death's pride, set the tone of the whole poem—cutting death

down to size ; 5-8 are a recognition of death as soul's liberation ; 9-12 demonstrate death's subordination to other agencies and modes of destruction ; 13-14 are a triumphant assertion of the death of Death. The final impression is one of total sincerity and intensity of feeling, a real conviction generated by felt emotions, not by rhetorical blandishments.

The poem opens with an adagio movement, sure and controlled, personifying death : 'Death be not proud, though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,'

From the very beginning. Donne activates the process of negation and qualification of death's pride and power, adroitly manipulating words and syntax. The inflated importance accorded to the qualifier ('though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful'), with its disyllabic 'mighty' and 'dreadfull', is a deliberate build-up so that the deflation in 'for, thou art not soe'—all monosyllables—jolts us into recognizing, when we are least expecting it, the slightly comic contradiction and incongruity in death's claim : it is supposed 'mighty' only by 'some'.

Having scored his first hit, Donne allows us no respite as he presses home his advantage in

For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee ;

The plethora of pauses allows full emphasis on each word or group of words, throwing into stronger relief death's impotence and sham victories. The use of *ploce* in 'whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow' is significant. Donne is not trying to make rhetoric do the work of feeling. Nor is he launching a rhetorical assault to batter down death's awesome power. Any figure is obviously useful only as it demonstrates feeling. It is a sign of the poet's state of mind which the reader will readily interpret and instinctively react to. Donne's initial advantage is charged with an emphatic vigour by the repetition of *thou*, a climax intentionally built up to die away to the negation of 'Die not'. There is a touch of condescension and mockery of pity in 'poore death' which staggers under its self-delusion of terminating life.

The slower speed of the opening quatrain with its sostenuto

effect matches the quiet majesty and even tone of the next. The awareness of death as a superior form of 'rest and sleepe' lends an absolute finality to the scheme of its diminution in importance:

From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,

Rest and sleep are 'pictures' or images of death, approximating it in stillness and absence of movement. And it is this resemblance which makes death all the more welcome and pleasurable. Since much pleasure flows from rest and sleep, much more must flow from death itself. Terror is transformed into joy because death is both the soul's birth and its 'gaol-delivery':

And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,  
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.

The reference in line 7 may be to the proverbial saying that the best men die young or to the death of a righteous man who dies with the least fuss. It recalls the notion already made familiar in *A Valediction: forbidding mourning*: 'As virtuous men passe mildly' away, / And whisper to their soules, to goe, / Whilst some of their sad friends doe say, / That breath goes now, and some say, no:' (1-4).

The death of good men is a rest of their bodies and a birth or liberation of their souls. The idea of the soul as a prisoner in the body is, of course, Platonic (*Phedo*); the same idea is repeated by Psalm. cxlii. 7: 'Bring my soul out of prison'. It is an idea common enough in Donne. 'Oh my blacke Soule! ...' gives an almost verbatim echo in 'Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read, / Wisheth himselfe delivered from prison; / But damn'd and hal'd to execution, / Wisheth that still he might be 'imprisoned'; (5-8). More explicit are the lines from the *Second Anniversary*; 'But thinke that Death hath now enfranchis'd thee, / Thou hast thy 'expansion now and libertee'; (179-80) and '... This to thy soule allow, / Thinke thy shell broke, ...' (183-4). Here too Donne calls death the soul's 'third birth', adding 'Creation gave her one, a second grace'.<sup>10</sup>

The sestet constitutes the counterturn in thought and mood. It strikes a more vigorous and positive note, replacing the more subdued tone of negation and qualification in the octet. Appropriately

enough, the poem gathers characteristic momentum in the sestet, achieving a steady fortissimo effect which is resolved in the couplet. After the exalted consciousness of death as liberation, the rousing tone is sustained with a near-regal sonority as Donne delivers his coup de grâce :

Thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,  
And popple, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,  
And better then thy stroake ; why swell'st thou then ?

Though rhetoric largely creates and sustains the stately effect in these lines, its role is clearly functional : it supports, not substitutes, feeling. For what shapes the use of *asyndeton* and *anaphora* is the pressure of feeling.

The mortal terror is itself reduced to the abject submissiveness of a slave in a line where the words are deliberately arranged in a diminishing order of importance : 'Thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men'. The enumeration of alternative means or agencies of death — as opposed to Death as natural decay — reveals it as subservient to *Fate* or predestined death, *chance* or death by accidental means, *kings* or death by the deliberate processes of law, and *desperate men* or death by murder. Similarly the next line catalogues the several alternative modes of death : *poyson* or secret killings, *warre* or mass killings, and *sickness* or death by disease. (Holy Sonnet 4 [11. 5-7] also catalogues the several modes of death enumerated in Revelation VI-XII.)

The full impact of these two lines is felt so intensely because *asyndeton* makes it feasible to stress each significant word (*Fate*, *chance*, *kings*, *desperate*, *men*, *poyson*, *warre* and *sickness*). The lack of connectives conveys the impression of excitement and rapidity, as if the words are about to run ahead of the poet's thought. This effect is reinforced by *anaphora* or initial repetition in 10-12 ('And...And ... And'). While it forcefully stresses death's subservience by repetition, it also appears to stretch the decasyllabic lines so taut that they convey, in their breathless, frantic hurry to the climax, the impression of an exultant emotion, straining to spill over the line-unit, as death is relentlessly stripped of its last props.

The belittling process is inexorably pursued, but with a conscious disarming air of appearing to state an axiom without any effort :

And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well ;  
And better then thy stroake ; why swell'st thou then ?

Death makes us sleep but so do drugs, the juice of poppy and *charmes* ; and they do it even better than death's 'stroake'. The second half of the line appropriately poses the question after death has been *shown* to stand as 'verier ghost' as it were, of its once proud, puffed-up self. By implying the expected response, the question *clinches* an issue, the outcome of which strikes us as inevitable and logical.

The crescendo reached in the preceding quatrain is resolved, with an air of sweeping finality, by a triumphant assertion of death of Death :

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

Line 13 repeats 'sleepe' (l. 11), but in a different sense : the sleep of drugs is heavy and long ; death's is short. More significantly, the 'short sleepe' is in reality an awakening into Eternity. Donne's sermon preached at Whitehall (February 29, 1627/28) on Acts. 7 : 60 ('And when He had said this, He fell asleep') provides an elaborate gloss on 'Death is but a Sleepe' : 'that to those that die in Christ, Death is but a Sleepe ; to all others, Death is Death, literally Death ... So then, the Death of the Righteous is a sleepe ; first, as it delivers them into a present rest ... And then, lastly, it is so also as it promises a future waking in a glorious Resurrection' when there will be 'no ends or beginnings, but one equal eternity'.<sup>11</sup>

The climactic line in its steady, irresistible movement of voice affirms the plain fact with which the poem comes to rest : 'And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die'. It is affirmation essentially Pauline in spirit : "The last enemy to be destroyed is death: ... When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written : 'Death is swallowed up in victory'. 'O death, where is thy victory ? / O death, where is thy sting ?' "(I Cor. XV. 26, 54-5).

This reading, I believe, demonstrates how Donne conceals under the façade of apparent simplicity and artlessness a complex response, modulating from the slight initial banter through the quiet understanding to the exultation at the end, to the pride and terror of

death. The ultimate conviction is fully convincing because it is *believed* in, not rhetorically *imposed*, by Donne: he dares to "stand up to the terror" (Martz) precisely because he is convinced that death is no terror. It is difficult to understand where Martz detects "a tone of stridency, almost of truculence" (p. 144) when Donne does not at all attempt to hector or intimidate Death. Nor do I find Sanders convincing, in the light of my reading, when he casually dismisses the sestet as a "blustering sophistry", smacking of a "swaggering bravura" (p. 126). 'Death be not proud...' is a poem of private experience with public appeal where Donne's personal musings re-create for us a situation which provides a momentary but vivid glimpse of the momentous drama awaiting enactment in Eternity.

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2. Louis L. Martz. *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven, 1954). See pp. 43-53 for his discussion of the Holy Sonnets.
3. "John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* and the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition", *Studies in Philology*, LVI (July, 1959), pp. 504-18.
4. *John Donne's Poetry* (Cambridge, 1971).
5. John Sparrow, ed. *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (Cambridge, 1923).
6. *Ibid.*
7. Theodore Gill, ed. *The Sermons of John Donne* (New York, 1958), p. 265
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-2.
9. G. R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, eds. *The Sermons of John Donne* (Berkeley, 1953-62), VI. 106.
10. *Ibid.*, VI. 134-5: 'There are in this man, this Christian...three births; one, *Per generationem*, so we are borne of our naturall mother; one, *Per regenerationem*, so we are borne of our spirituall Mother, the Church, by Baptisme; and a third, *Per resurrectionem*, and so we are borne of the generall Mother of us all, when the earth shall be delivered, not of twins, but of millions...in the Resurrection'.
11. Gill., op. cit., pp. 251-3.



## THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL: A REVALUATION

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B. S. PATHANIA

SURPRISINGLY enough, many critics have complained that Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* is infected by sentimentality. For example, Bernbaum asserts that Sheridan "kept within the bounds to which sensibility had confined the Comic Muse"<sup>1</sup>, and then attempts to prove that *The School for Scandal* is not free from sentimental tendencies. Thorndike remarks that much of the play "is merely the standardized formula of the old comedy of manners adapted to the sentimental decorum of the reign of George III"<sup>2</sup>. Elton points out that sentiment "re-enters by a back door in the presentment of Charles"<sup>3</sup>. According to Potts, Sheridan "made concessions to it (sentimentality), especially in the document of *The School for Scandal*"<sup>4</sup>. Kaul, after a brief discussion of the play, goes so far as to assert that Sheridan's plays "strike us in some ways as more sentimental than even Steele's thoroughgoing sentimental comedies"<sup>5</sup>.

In contrast to the above views of *The School for Scandal* are those of the critics who rightly see it as belonging to the "pure" tradition of comedy. Nicoll, for example, remarks that the play "marks the acme of Sheridan's comic achievement"<sup>6</sup>. And Boas holds that it is through Joseph Surface that Sheridan "delivered the death-blow in the campaign against moralizing sentimental comedy"<sup>7</sup> of the age. Nicoll and Boas, though right, are hardly illuminating; they merely pronounce judgments without attempting the why's. Like others, they only throw a few significant hints and do not concern themselves with a convincing refutation of the traditional Sheridan criticism which views his plays as sentimental. It is the purpose of this short paper to defend the play against some specific, though misguided, charges of sentimentality by questioning some judgments and confirming others.

Sentimental comedy (e.g. Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* or Cumberland's *The West Indian*) portrayed characters to exemplify virtue. It had very few comic scenes because its action was centred around a pathetic situation in order to arouse heart-stirring emotions. It stressed morality by a frequent uttering of moral platitudes by the good characters. It had distressing situations, grave characters and melancholy dialogue although it ended happily. In view of the contemporary taste for tears and didacticism, it intensified emotion in the interests of moral purpose. Unlike the sentimental comedy of the age, *The School for Scandal* is a remarkably non-exemplary comedy. Sheridan has clearly avoided the didactic-moral strain in sentimental comedy. While the sentimental playwright used his play as a means of direct instruction, Sheridan points to no distinctive moral. The serious moralization of sentimental comedy is replaced by sparkling wit. "Never for a moment", Nicoll rightly notes, "does the sparkle disappear; so that sometimes we are inclined to be surfeited with too much of these intellectual fireworks"<sup>8</sup>. Sentimental comedy, on the other hand, displayed but few traces of wit.

Again, while the sentimental playwright was eager to call forth the spectators' tears, Sheridan seems to miss no opportunity to raise a laugh. In the opening scene of *The School for Scandal* we are much amused by the activities of the slanderers led by Lady Sneerwell. They entertain us through sheer brilliance of their satire and sarcasm. For example, in Act II, scene ii, Backbite remarks that the make-up of the widow Ochre ends so obviously near the neck that "she looks like a mended statue, in which the connoisseur sees at once that the head's modern though the trunk's antique"<sup>9</sup>. The scandal scenes of the play are replete with comic brilliance and satire.

Secondly, the scenes in which Charles Surface, the hero of the play, appears are marked by a delightful lightheartedness. In Act III, scene ii, we find that Charles, though bankrupt, lives in a grand style in his house. The next scene reveals the prodigal with his merry-gang, deploring the great degeneracy of the age in which many people abstain from wine. The auction scene (Act IV, scene i) affords even more delightful entertainment by means of constant dramatic irony in the situation as well as Charles's witty comments. Charles little

realizes that he is addressing Sir Oliver himself who has gone there in the guise of Mr Premium, a broker, in order to discover his nephew's true character.

Next, there are those delightful, unsentimental scenes which expose Joseph Surface as a sentimental knave. The famous screen Scene IV, (iii) which exposes Joseph's hypocrisy is indeed the *tour de force* of Sheridan's comic genius. The apparently virtuous Joseph attempts to seduce Lady Teazle. But when her husband is seen coming to the library, she hides behind the screen. Here Sheridan makes delightful use of the old device of revelation through overheard conversation. In Act V, scene i, Joseph's uncle Sir Oliver, pretending to be a poor relation (Stanley), calls on Joseph to see whether his nephew is worthy to inherit his riches. This scene owes most of its effectiveness to dramatic irony. Equally delightful are the scenes of recrimination between Sir Peter Teazle and his young impetuous wife who exasperates him with her witty rejoinders. Such scenes show Sheridan's unerring capacity for amusing situations and witty conversation.

To be sure, Sheridan has used several conventional ingredients—the rich uncle in disguise (Sir Oliver), the petulant old husband quarrelling with his sprightly young wife, the hypocrite finally exposed, and the prodigal (Charles Surface) reformed. But by giving a new imaginative force to familiar situations and characters, he has achieved a different tone. The total impression of the play as a result of its situations, characters and language is one of “laughing” comedy as opposed to that of sentimental comedy in which almost every scene is used as a means of arousing the sorrowful emotions as in *The Conscious Lovers*. One cannot, therefore, but disagree with Bernbaum, Thorndike, Potts and Kaul (cited above) who try to place Sheridan's play among the sentimental comedies.

Some critics (Elton, for example) find a touch of the sentimental in Sheridan's portrayal of Charles Surface as benevolent and ready to repent and reform in the end. But they forget that, unlike the reformed prodigals of sentimental comedy, the “reformed” Charles of Act V does not ooze morality or make any tall promises of reformation. Also, it would be wrong to label him as sentimental

because of his refusal in the auction scene to dispose of his uncle's portrait. His refusal seems to spring from a mere whim. In the true sentimental comedy this situation would have been utilized for wrenching the heart-strings with a lachrymose presentation of Sir Oliver and Charles. But in *The School for Scandal* it accounts for one of its most delightful scenes.

It is suggested<sup>10</sup> that Sheridan has made concession to the sentimental comedy by creating a paragon in Rowley, the ex-steward to the Surface family. Actually, however, Rowley is adequately differentiated from the serious and lack-lustre stewards of sentimental comedy such as Steele's Humphrey in *The Conscious Lovers*. He is delightfully witty; he even quotes Shakespeare to voice his justifiable confidence in Charles's goodness of heart (246). He is capable of being devastatingly ironical and sneering. For example, when Joseph is properly exposed, Rowley teases Sir Peter by quoting him ironically: "Aye, as Sir Peter says, he (Joseph) is a man of sentiment" (301).

Collins<sup>11</sup> believes that the benevolent Sir Oliver has been introduced to bring in the sentimental element to please contemporary audiences. But one has only to compare him with Cibber's Sir Friendly Moral in *The Lady's Last Stake* (1707), Mrs Cowley's Drummond in *The Runaway* (1776) and Cumberland's Stockwell in *The West Indian* (1771) to know the difference. These characters are extremely fond of sententious, moralizing utterances. Sir Oliver, on the other hand, never tries to preach; he even shows a healthy disgust at Joseph's pious, but essentially insincere, sentiments: "Oh! plague of his sentiments! If he salutes me with a scarp of morality in his mouth, I shall be sick directly" (245). He hates "to see prudence clinging to the green suckers of youth" (245). Again, while the benevolent characters of sentimental comedy are quite grave, Sir Oliver is always jovial. This is clear from his delightful asides as Premium or Stanley.

Phythian suggests that the "demureness"<sup>12</sup> of Maria's relationship with her lover Charles associates her with the sentimental heroines. But although Maria is not as interesting as Shakespeare's Rosalind or Goldsmith's Kate Hardcastle, she is certainly a far cry from the weeping sentimental heroine like Indiana in Steele's *The Conscious*

*Lovers* or *Fidelia* in Moore's *The Foundling*. If *The School for Scandal* were a sentimental play, Maria would be in continual tears about Charles's difficulties. But she is neither passive nor pitiable. Instead of shedding tears, she boldly speaks of the unmanliness of the male gossipers : "We have pride, envy, rivalry, and a thousand motives to depreciate each other ; but the male slanderer must have the cowardice of a woman before he can traduce one" (218).

To be sure, *The School for Scandal* ends with the reconciliation of Sir Peter Teazle and Lady Teazle. But reconciliation between husband and wife is by no means peculiar to sentimental comedy. Marriages, reunions and reconciliations have always been the common stuff of comedy. The true sentimental comedy usually ends in an unadulterated wave of repentance, forgiveness and harmony. But Sheridan makes no attempt to treat the spectator to raptures of repentance. In fact Lady Sneerwell's parting shot directed at Lady Teazle ("May your husband live these fifty years !") gives a rather ironic twist to the reconciliation of the Teazles. In the theatre Lady Sneerwell's sally is likely to be greeted with a great roar of laughter.

The sententious moralizing of sentimental comedy is held up to ridicule in the person of Joseph Surface whom Sir Peter Teazle foolishly admires as a man of sentiment because of his habit of uttering high-flown moral reflections. Actually Joseph conceals villainous intentions beneath a moral exterior. His exposure as "artful, selfish, and malicious—in short, a sentimental knave" (215) receives prominent treatment in the play. When Maria voices her disapproval of malicious wit, Joseph remarks, "Certainly, madam, to smile at the jest which plants a thorn in another's breast is to become a principal in the mischief" (218). While the sentimental playwrights like Cibber, Steele, Hugh Kelly and Cumberland presented such "sentiments" as admirable, Sheridan shows them as hypocritical and despicable. In reality, Joseph plots intrigues to alienate Maria and Charles, and attempts to seduce Lady Teazle. At one stage Lady Sneerwell cuts him short, saying, "O Lud ! You are going to be moral, and forget that you are among friends" (217). The use of "moral" as a term of abuse is significant, as every sentimental comedy contained numerous passages of moralising

speech. Lawrence rightly remarks that Joseph is "the irrefutable arraignment of the hollow insincerities of the sentimental school"<sup>15</sup>.

*The School for Scandal* is, thus, the antithesis of sentimental comedy as it avoids the latter's distressing situations, pathetic characters, emotional dialogues, heavy didacticism, and excessive emphasis on the goodness of human nature. It ridicules the sententious moralizing of sentimental comedy and contains what the latter lacks—amusing situations, entertaining characters and witty dialogue. It is characterized by sparkling wit, free laughter and abundant humour.

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5. A. N. Kaul, *The Action of English Comedy: Studies in the Encounter of Abstraction and Experience from Shakespeare to Shaw* (Delhi, 1970), p. 139.
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## THE THEME OF ESCAPE IN CONRAD'S *VICTORY*

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NARAIN PRASAD SHUKLA

THE idea of escape constitutes the main theme in Conrad's *Victory* and serves as an inclusive metaphor for the interpretation of the character of Heyst, who has taken refuge in a lonely island as an answer to the world's problems. The alienist attitude to life adopted by Heyst brings about his disillusionment and is the cause of his tragic end in the novel.

In the novel Heyst has withdrawn to a remote island of the Malayan Archipelago to escape the problems of the complex European world. The lonely world of the island becomes an escape-world for Heyst, who is a man of sensitive and idealistic nature, who has found the evil and imperfection of the entangling western world too hard to bear. The Malayan island symbolises the inner vacuum and consequent isolation of the western man, isolation instilled by his father, a misanthropic philosopher, and nurtured by his experiences with his business partner Morrison. Despite his father's warnings, despite his conviction that "he who forms a tie is lost" (pp. 199-200)<sup>1</sup>, despite his announced purpose "to look on and never make a sound" (p. 176), in his deliberately assumed role of "an indifferent stroller going through the world's bustle" (p. 199), Heyst is basically a human being who cannot but respond to a human call. He does not understand his own nature and in attempting to do something which is against human nature, he meets his doom. Conrad had a great love for humanity and showed the danger of severing the chain with it. He firmly believed that the essence of humanity was to live with it and not to escape from it. Like Jim, Heyst learns, although belatedly, that such an escape is impossible. Evil and trouble cannot be escaped because they are intrinsic to man. The seeds of Heyst's destruction are like-wise within. The intrusion by Jones and Ricardo like intrusion by Brown in *Lord Jim* has its doleful effects precisely because of the defect within the heroes of

both the novels. Heyst's philosophy proves untenable for man cannot escape involvement in human affairs and yet remain human.

Heyst becomes involved by virtue of his rescue of Lena, which involves him with Schomberg, and Schomberg extends a chain of involvement to include Jones and Ricardo. Heyst's involvement with Morrison creates the impression that Heyst has money, and money too is a matter of involvement. Thus humanity encroaches upon Heyst and the evil in it is perfectly suited to take advantage of his escape-philosophy. Heyst bears considerable responsibility for what happens to himself and Lena both because his own actions attract Jones and Ricardo and because, more importantly, his isolation on a distant island guarantees their success. There is no one as there might have been on the mainland to help Heyst. That is what Heyst does not realise — that while in society a man can be hurt by the cruelty, villainy and evil of others, he can also be helped by their goodwill, their generosity, their idealism and their sacrifice.

When we first see Heyst he is on his mountain-top island, aloof from the rest of the world, so that at night its glow appears indistinguishable from its nearest neighbour, the volcano. This setting reflects the duality within Heyst's personality—a tension between the primitive Heyst and the civilized Heyst. This dualism corresponds to the tension between impulse and reflection, and illustrates the fact that by impulse, Heyst is prone to engagement, involvement, but by reflection, he is inclined to aloofness, detachment. Impulse leads him to shun escapism, reflection leads him to retreat back to it.

Once Heyst becomes involved with Morrison and coal business, he goes about everywhere "organising with all his might. This was no mooning about. This was business. And this sudden display of purposeful energy shook the incredulity of the most sceptical (25)". Heyst is capable of action, of direction and purpose. He can become emotionally committed and loyal to a cause. When so involved, the island becomes a base of operations rather than escape, and if the business had been kept up, Heyst might have become another businessman. But when the business is liquidated Heyst has his purpose in life taken away from him, and he is in a worse plight than in the early days of aimless drifting. He tries to cling to the station, staying on the island where his office was, saying, "I



am keeping hold" (p. 28). But we see that this clinging is of escapist nature when he also says "Oh, I am done with facts" (p. 28). In his business-venture facts were the only important thing to him. But facts are a part of reality. Facts caused the collapse of his business. Reality is now too painful to be involved in, and since the facts are the harshest part of his reality, Heyst will avoid them as much as he can.

The only contact that Heyst has with larger humanity is through Davidson's steamer. Davidson alters the course of his steamer to take it near Heyst's wharf—careful not to give the impression of an intrusion: "I hope he would not think I am intruding" (p. 29), he observes. Davidson can never see Heyst on the island and so believes him to be hiding; it is he who first applies the epithet "hermit" to Heyst (p. 31). While "hermit" seems to be a suitable epithet, we are led to believe that Heyst is not naturally aloof from mankind:

But apparently, Heyst was not a hermit by temperament. The sight of his kind was not invincibly odious to him. We must believe this since for some reason or other he did come out of his retreat for a while. Perhaps it was only to see whether there were any letters for him at the Tesmans. I don't know—No one knows. But this reappearance shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble. Axel Heyst ought not to have cared for his letters—or whatever it was that brought him out after something more than a year and a half in samburan. But it was of no use. He had not the hermit's vocation! That was the trouble it seems (p. 31).

The lack of any specific motive for return to the mainland suggests that he is still attracted towards the world in spite of his philosophy and delusion.

Very shortly after Heyst touches the island in Davidson's, he tells his friend that he has run off with a girl from the orchestra in Schomberg's hotel. He does this because he was moved by the pitiable condition of the girls in the orchestra. He couldn't remain aloof from it because he was moved by a human feeling. He said to Davidson:

I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon whole. But I have done with it, I shall never lift a little finger again. At one time

I thought that the intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not, but now I have done with observation too (pp. 53-54).

Since all action is a source of trouble, Heyst would forsake all action. His idealism is too absolute, too perfect for an imperfect world that requires action for bare survival. Heyst tries to escape what is essentially inescapable. The reason is that he thinks in the oversimplified terms of moral black and white. He has the idea that the individual is good while the social group is evil. He fails to see that existence is the composite mixture of good and evil and that the evil impulses are as much within the individual as they are within the collectivity of man. Heyst expresses his position more clearly: "The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance, but I think here we can defy the fates" (p. 57). And so Heyst renounces the world for his safe little island.

What prompts Heyst to take the plunge second time from his habitual detachment to rescue Lena is his thorough disenchantment caused by the failure of his business enterprise. Canrad tells us: "Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament beguiled into action suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to man accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise" (p. 65). While in this state Heyst notes the exploitation of orchestra girls he "felt a sudden pity for these beings, exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos" (p. 70). Feeling sorry for himself, the naturally sympathetic Heyst becomes sorry for them. The result is another plunge in the sense of a sudden departure from his habitual mode of behaviour: "Those dreamy spectators of the world's agitation are terrible once the desire to act gets hold of them" (p. 77). The fact that it is departure from his moral behaviour is a break for Lena, most probably, for we are told "his complete inexperience gave him the necessary audacity" (p. 77). Had he been ordinarily a man of action, he might not have acted so boldly and decisively.

Lena's arrival on the island brings a new element of thematic tension because she possesses those qualities of fidelity and attachment whose lack in Heyst mars his personality and makes him

susceptible to invasion by Mr Jones and his crew. She tells Heyst for example, "I know I am not of much account, but I know how to stand by a man" (p. 88). She also says, "It isn't easy to stand up for yourself when you feel there is nothing and nobody at your back" (p. 88). Heyst's loyalty to Morrison and Lena causes him to forsake his philosophy of detachment and thus to suffer, but it is his failure to comprehend Lena's loyalty to him that causes her destruction and his.

Lena should be important to Heyst for repudiating by her actions his philosophy of "absolute moral and intellectual liberty" which he had got from his father. We see that too much freedom is not human for freedom at least can be as destructive as its opposite, of which we are convinced by the fates of both Heyst and Kurtz. It is true that freedom from any sort of attachment makes a man invulnerable to many agonies of life but the cost of such stoicism is also very great. An indication of this cost is given by Conrad :

Heyst was not conscious of either of friends or enemies. It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal, with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world— invulnerable because elusive (p. 90).

Heyst initially breathed in this philosophy while he lived with his father, a philosopher of some brilliance, a sceptic characterised as a "destroyer of dreams of hopes of beliefs" (p. 175). The nature and transmission of his philosophy is pretty well documented :

Three years of such companionship were bound to leave in the boy at that plastic and impressionable age a profound distrust of life. The young man learned to reflect which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost. It is not the clear sighted who lead the world. Great achievements are accomplished in a blessed warm mental fog which the pitiless cold blasts of the father's analysis had blown away from the son.

"I will drift", Heyst had said to himself deliberately, morally. He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soul like a detached leaf drifting in the wind currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade, to drift without ever catching on to anything. "This shall be my defence against life", he had said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other worthy alternative (pp. 91-92).

Reduced to a formula, the philosophy of the elder Heyst is "to look on and never make a sound" (p. 176). If you can't get involved, you can't get hurt. When put to the test, however, the philosophy fails as we see when Heyst acts with a sympathetic impulse towards Morrison. Heyst explains: "I who could not bear to hurt his feelings -- what else could I do? He insisted on regarding me as his saviour. I had to join him as one joins a child's game in a nursery" (p. 213). This is why Heyst becomes his business partner. His own hypersensitivity creates an involvement with Morrison that he cannot be cruel enough to sever despite his pride in detachment. Conrad tells us, "The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt actually that he was alone on the bank of stream. In his pride he determined not to enter" (pp. 175-76). This pride is likewise a poor defence against Lena's charms. After he forms a tie, of course, he regrets it. Reflecting on his association with Morrison, Heyst concludes, "he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul" (pp. 199-200). And when he realises his attachment to Lena he is hurt by the sight of his own life "which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness" (p. 174). For she tempts him to leave the bank of the escape world and enter the stream of life.

Heyst's attitude towards life was one of aversion and he regarded all activities of it as an inducement to participation in it. Intellectually he prefers not to participate in it, but to remain free and aloof. In this light we can understand why Heyst believes that in a subtle way his association with Morrison corrupted him:

He got it into his head that he could do nothing without me. And was I now, he asked me, to spurn and ruin him? (p. 202).

But once Heyst does become involved he has the honour to see it through. But we can readily see how destructive his father's analysis of illusions proves to be, "Truth, work ambitions, love itself may be only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life but when one takes a hand one must play the game" (p. 203). Because of such sceptical wisdom he views his association with Lena in the same way as he viewed that with Morrison: "His resentment was not against the girl—but against the life itself—that commonest of snares in which he felt himself caught. Seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsolated by the lucidity of his mind" (p. 215).

Heyst's encounter with Lena provides him a chance to join life and become a part of it. He responds to her presence but not entirely, again he is torn between impulse and reflection :

In holding her surrendered hand he had found closer communion than they had ever achieved before. But even there lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome which it seemed nothing ever would overcome—the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare (p. 212).

To Heyst the most human of things are snares : "Thought, action, so many snares. If you begin to think you will be unhappy" (p. 193). But the cruellest part of his father's philosophy is the belief that love too is a snare. Heyst's father had written, "of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love, the most subtle too ; for the desire is the bed of dreams" (p. 219).

Heyst's stoical indifference proves dangerous for it proves fatal, resulting in his own death and that of Lena. Heyst reveals : "— I had no schemes, no plans and not even great firmness of mind to make me unduly obstinate. It was simply moving on, while the others, perhaps, were going somewhere. An indifference as to the roads and purposes makes one weaker, as it were. And I may say truly too, that I never did care. I won't say for life.— but for being alive" (pp. 211-212).

Heyst's situation demands considerable scheming for survival ; it also demands a zest for life. Heyst's philosophy saps him of these qualities which are necessary for survival. He would shun all struggle because struggle involves killing others : "The differences for which men murder each other are like everything else they do, the most contemptible, the most pitiful things to look back upon" (p. 212). To live in this world, Heyst must stop introspection, must not think how his actions would look like to others, he must do that which is required by the exigency of the situation. But Heyst is again aloof. He tells Lena : "To slay to love — the greatest enterprises of life upon a man ! And I have no experience of either" (p. 212). And since he will never take action, he will never experience either.

When Jones arrives on the island he tells Heyst ; "Come ! You can't expect to have it always your own way. You are a man of

the world" (p. 379). That is just not what Heyst accepts for himself. Heyst would like to have things his own way, but that is not going to be possible because a man like that must face the frustrations which the world has in store for him. Thus we see Jones taking an extra-human dimension, and is really a kind of retribution for Heyst. For Heyst in his defeatist mood violates the simple and universal moral code that a man must face up to his problems and try to overcome them. In giving up the battle against evil Heyst therefore unintentionally succumbs to it and deserves retribution and may not altogether escape with impunity.

The novel unflinchingly proves the hollowness of Heyst's indifferent attitude towards life and the fallaciousness of his escapist philosophy making it the true tragedy of disillusionment. Faithful Lena succeeds in getting the knife from Ricardo and while she is fatally shot in the process she feels victorious. In her exaltation she cries out to Heyst: "I have saved you! Why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?, for her destiny is inextricably bound up with his escape-world. She exalts in her illusion of success of having saved Heyst thinking he "was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart—for ever" (p. 407). But Heyst can do no more than remain standing over her unable to give expression to his mistrustful love. A man who has been himself running away from the world can have no sanctuary to offer another. Heyst's last words to Davidson reveal a tragic recognition of his plight, "Ah! Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope to love—and to put its trust in life!" (p. 410). Heyst cannot trust, and thus he cannot act, either with regard to the threat of Jones, or the offering of Lena. All he can do is commit suicide by setting fire to the bungalow, burning both Lena and himself. Davidson conjectures: "I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body, and fire purifies everything" (p. 410). A pity that the fire of experience couldn't purify Heyst's soul before he came to this tragic end.

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## ART AND REALITY IN WALTER PATER'S CRITICAL THEORY

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ALOK RAI

WILLIAM Gaunt reports a story about Pater as a boy saying, to one of his horrified schoolfellows: "What fun it would be to be ordained and not believe a word of what you're saying".<sup>1</sup> In many ways, that statement is indicative of the quality of Pater's mind. Henry James hinted at the difficulty when he described Pater, in an 1894 letter to Edmund Gosse as "a mask without a face".<sup>2</sup> And if one tries to get beyond the mask one is constantly aware of dealing with a complex, contradictory personality, trembling uncertainly between the ardent young man and the queer, thin-blooded don; between, one might say, "the influence of summer is like a poison in one's blood"<sup>3</sup> and "the sensitive and delicate literary instruments of the age of Queen Anne".<sup>4</sup>

Any study of Pater is faced with an initial chronological difficulty which is implied in the partially-valid distinction one makes between the early and late Pater. As one moves up from 'Winckelmann' (1867) and 'Aesthetic Poetry' (1868), through *The Renaissance* (1873) to *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and *Appreciations* (1889), one must first relate him to what came after him — i. e. study him in his function as influence on / symptom of the romantic decadence<sup>5</sup> — and then, gradually, ease him back into relation with the earlier Romantic theorists, with Coleridge and Arnold.

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An 1876 reviewer made the somewhat ambiguous comment that Pater was "the most thoroughly representative critic that the romantic school has yet produced".<sup>6</sup> But Pater *is*, in a sense, the most considerable representative of a *phase* of the romantic sensibility, and even his relation to the earlier theorists is coloured by the glass of that peculiar stain — the late-Romantic decadence.

It should be possible to match almost every variant of the decadent sensibility that Mario Praz details with such loving subtlety in *The Romantic Agony* with something from Pater. There is "that incurable thirst for the sense of escape"<sup>7</sup> and "the strange suggestion of a deliberate choice between Christ and a rival lover".<sup>7</sup> "Here...as in some medicated air, exotic flowers of sentiment expand, among people of a remote and unaccustomed beauty, somnambulistic, frail, androgynous ..."<sup>7</sup> and "the influence of summer is like a poison in one's blood, with a sudden bewildering sickening of life and all things".<sup>7</sup> Witness Pater's Medusa :

Leonardo alone cuts to the centre ; he alone realises it as the head of a corpse, exercising its powers through all the circumstances of death. What may be called *the fascination of corruption* penetrates in every touch the exquisitely finished beauty. About the dainty lines of the cheek the bat flits unheeded. The delicate snakes seem literally strangling each other in terrified struggle to escape from the Medusa brain...<sup>8</sup>

But it would be futile to imagine that it was just from such passages that the Decadence derived, that it was a mere wilful perversion, a feverish prank born in the incense-laden rooms of a Brasenose don. Such an assessment would be unjust both to Pater and indeed to that phase of sensibility. Further, it would be wrong to proceed on the assumption that the Decadence *need not* have happened. If we look closely enough at Pater we can see the causal complex that brought about the perversion of the pure "mountain"-inspiration of Wordsworth with such depressing inevitability.

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Coleridge had rejected the empiricist hypothesis because it landed him in the mechanical embrace of Hartleian psychology. But Pater, with greater formal training in philosophy, could not really reject the empiricist hypothesis simply because he did not like where it led him. The eloquent subjectivism of the 'Conclusion' *does* get toned down with the passage of time, but till the very end, subjectivism and its willed yet fragile transcendence through art is the centre of Pater's work.

It is a thankless task to try and paraphrase Pater's sense of the moment that is a "sharp apex...between two hypothetical



eternities",<sup>9</sup> his sense of "the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity",<sup>10</sup> his stirring call to "gather all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch". The 'Conclusion' is explicit :

If we continue to dwell in thought on this world... the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has pierced on its way to us, or from us to *that which we can only conjecture to be without*. Every one of these impressions is the impressions of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. ... To a tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream, to a single, sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves".

One might well feel the need at this point—"Not the fruit of experience but experience itself..." —to react with some dismissive variant of Eliot's slightly old-maidish comment about "untidy lives",<sup>11</sup> and such a response would have the support of Pater's own action in withdrawing the 'Conclusion' from the second edition of *The Renaissance* (1877) because "it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it may fall". But Pater's subjectivism is too integral to his vision to be disavowed simply by withdrawing from public circulation a particular 'Conclusion'.

The exhilaration—"To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy..." —was short-lived, but once the work has entered the soul it is not easily dislodged. The Empiricists had undermined the reality of experience and it was no longer possible to circumvent them. Newman comes to terms with the illusory nature of experience, the epistemological isolation, by emphasising the reality of the illusion : "...voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us".<sup>12</sup> But, for reasons which must ultimately have to do with the individual temperament, Pater is obsessed with the illusion, is unwilling to take refuge in reality as a working hypothesis.

All his life Pater is trying to find a lost wholeness, assimilate

the consequences of the Empiricist sabotage and put the pieces together again—the fact with the illusion, the ideal with the actual, the ends with the means. If there is no principle of coherence in experience, he argues, then any concept of final ends is untenable: “To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified... Justify rather the ends by the means... whatever may become of the fruit, make sure of the flowers and leaves...”<sup>13</sup> The anarchic search of the Decadents for sensation is an obvious outgrowth of a cognate difficulty regarding the nature of experience and cannot be entirely discredited by referring to their regrettably sloppy lives.

Religion offered a possible sustaining reality, and it was a consolation that many took to in that troubled time. But it offered consolation at the cost of the only reality one *could* really know—the physical experience of the world, even if solipsist, unrelated and unrelateable. We have Pater setting up the dichotomy: “Christian asceticism... discrediting the slightest touch of sense, has from time to time, provoked into strong emphasis the contrast or antagonism to itself, of the artistic life, with its inevitable sensuousness... It has sometimes seemed hard to pursue that life without something of a conscious disavowal of a spiritual world; and this imparts to genuine artistic interests a kind of intoxication”. And then, the genuine regret: “From this intoxication, Winckelmann is free: he fingers those pagan marbles with unsinged hands, with no sense of shame or loss... The longer we contemplate (the) Hellenic ideal, in which man was at unity with himself, with his physical nature, with the outward world, the more we may be inclined to regret that we should ever have passed beyond it, to contend for a perfection that makes the blood turbid, and frets the flesh, and discredits the actual world about us”.<sup>14</sup> In an 1872 essay the idea of art as an alternative religion is stated even more explicitly: “In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion”.<sup>15</sup>

Pater wrote enthusiastically about Wordsworth, and one might be led to suppose that Nature, Wordsworth's Nature, could have offered

a possible release for the imprisoned mind. But, wrote Pater in 1868, the mind's "sense" of the "things of nature" "was not objective, no real escape to the world without us. The aspects and motions of nature only reinforced its prevailing mood, and were in conspiracy with one's brain against one".<sup>16</sup> It is the same sensibility that Coleridge had foreshadowed in the 'Dejection' ode—the eternal outsider, in an agony of self-absorption; the narcissistic nightmare of a palace of mirrors; the face against the window-pane, distorted, looking in, always outside.

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Art offered an obvious refuge, a parallel, compensatory reality. In 'The Child in the House' he had remarked... "the growth of an almost diseased sensibility to the spectacle of suffering, and parallel with this, the rapid growth of a certain capacity of fascination by bright colour and choice form."<sup>17</sup> Or again; "The base of all artistic genius is the power of conceiving humanity in a new, striking, rejoicing way, of putting a happy world of its own creation in place of the meaner world of our common days."<sup>18</sup> And art not only offered a sustaining parallel reality, it also related back to give significance to life itself since it proposed "frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake".<sup>19</sup>

But the stain of his earlier experience of isolation followed him. Commentators have remarked the historical relativism of his critical theory. In the essay on Coleridge he writes of "the relative spirit (which) by its constant dwelling on the more fugitive conditions or circumstances of things, breaking through a thousand rough and brutal classifications, and giving elasticity to inflexible principles, begets an intellectual *finesse* of which the ethical result is a delicate and tender justice in the criticism of human life".<sup>20</sup> Yet it is important to remember the paralysing conditions of the birth of this humility—i.e. if knowledge is impossible then judgment *must* be tentative. And it is possibly due to this somewhat morbid etiology that, despite the avowed relativism of his theory, everything that Pater writes about takes on a Paterian tone. Thus, *his* Wordsworth was "but pleading indirectly for that sincerity, that perfect fidelity to one's own inward presentations, to the precise features of the picture within,

without which any profound poetry is impossible".<sup>21</sup> Though he concedes in a footnote, writing of the Mona Lisa, that "for Vasari there was some further magic of crimson in the lips and cheeks, lost for us",<sup>22</sup> his temperamental momentum carries him on to write of La Gioconda as a late-Romantic *femme fatale* who is "older than the rocks among which she sits",<sup>23</sup> who, "like the vampire... has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave," upon whose head "all the ends of the world are come" and whose "eyelids are a little weary".<sup>24</sup> He makes little concession to the ruddy bloom that he admits she must have had for Vasari.

Whereas his relativism is enjoined by his unchanged allegiance to subjectivism, it offers him no escape from the prison of his isolated and isolating experience. He reaches out to artistic reality — the sub-paradoxical reality of artefact — but in him Arnold's dictum<sup>25</sup> is significantly modified: "...in aesthetic criticism, the first step towards 'seeing one's object as it really is', is to know one's impression as it really is".<sup>26</sup> He is critical of the abstract theorists who have not felt the need to make "one desperate effort to see and touch", and sees the task of aesthetics as "... (defining) beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible; to find not the universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it..."<sup>26</sup> There is a distinct anti-intellectual tendency in him, the contempt of one who feels deeply for those who feel only, at best, at second-hand, "people who would never really have been made glad by any Venus fresh-risen from the sea, and who praise the Venus of old Greece and Rome, only because they fancy her grown into something staid and tame."<sup>26</sup> The really important temperamental factor which he thinks the critic ought to possess is "the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects."<sup>27</sup> It is not difficult to see why the personality of the critic forms such an important part of the scheme: one can hardly miss the peculiar, personal urgency with which Pater comes to art.

But it is obviously not enough — neither by the general requirements of criticism as such, nor indeed by the peculiar motivations that provoke *this* criticism — to merely delineate and discriminate one's own impression. As Wellek points out,<sup>28</sup> it is only a "first step" in criticism "to know one's own impression ... to discriminate

it, to realise it distinctly".<sup>20</sup> But after the personal "pleasure"<sup>20</sup>, the critic must penetrate "through the given literary and artistic product, into the mental and inner constitution of the producer, shaping his work".<sup>21</sup> Pater's eloquent affirmation<sup>22</sup> of Rossetti's statement of the exclusive and precious reality of love "in a world where all else beside might be but shadow" leaves little doubt that Pater's apparently devious quest too was, after all, for an answering voice in his dark night.

It follows that, since an art-object exists so that it may be "penetrated through", art is, existentially speaking, a desperately serious matter.<sup>23</sup> Thus we find, somewhat surprisingly in Pater, a restatement of the peculiarly romantic virtue of sincerity: "In the highest as in the lowliest literature ... the one indispensable beauty is, after all, truth:— truth to bare fact in the latter, as to some personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from men's ordinary sense of it, in the former; truth there as accuracy, truth here as expression, that finest and most intimate form a truth, the *vraie verite*."<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to remark that what appears to be a content-criterion-truth turns into a plea for formal precision. As he says elsewhere in the essay on 'Style': "...all beauty is in the long run only fineness of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within." It would be unjust, nevertheless, to say that Pater wishes to create a palace of art, an artificial world which may substitute the "real" one, because such a conclusion would contradict the whole drive of his tone and argument, and, as we shall see, his later formulations regarding the distinction between good and great art. But formal precision in art *is* important for the organisation of suffering — and this organisation is important because it is precisely to escape from anarchic, senseless, chaotic and continual loss and suffering that Pater comes to art.

One can see a variant of his earlier desire to unite ends and means in the attempt, most notably in 'The School of Giorgione' to unite form and content :

All art constantly aspires to the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant

effort of art to obliterate it. That the mere matter of a poem, for instance, its subject... should be nothing without the form, the spirit of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should *become an end in itself*, should penetrate every part of the matter, this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees.

Because "all language involves a translation from inward to outward"<sup>85</sup>, and because only if the translation is perfect can the sensitive critic "penetrate" from the outer to the inner, the poet must give his reader an assurance "that he has the science of the instrument he plays on, perhaps, after all with a freedom which in such a case will be the freedom of a master."<sup>86</sup> The style, indeed, *must be* the man, "not in his unreasoned or uncharacteristic caprices, involuntary or affected, but in absolutely sincere apprehension of what is most real to him."<sup>85</sup> Thus, he speaks enthusiastically about "...that frugal closeness of style which makes the most of a word", praises that "austerity" which is "not correctness or purism of the mere scholar, but a security against the otiose, a jealous exclusion of what does not really tell towards the pursuit of relief, of life and vigour in the portraiture of one's sense"<sup>86</sup>, and repeats Michelangelo's dictum about art being the removal of "surplusage".<sup>86</sup>

Yet Pater baulks at Coleridge's definition of organicism as a kind of structure which the imaginative artist cannot help realising. When Coleridge says that Shakespeare has an understanding which directs "self-consciously a power and and implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness,"<sup>86</sup> Pater impatiently rejects it by saying that "the associative act in art or poetry is made to look like some blindly organic process of assimilation." He complains that though Coleridge's explanation "expresses truly the sense of self-delighting independent life which the finished work of art gives us, it hardly figures the process by which such work was produced. Here there is no blind ferment of lifeless elements towards the realisation of a type. By exquisite analysis, the artist attains clearness of an idea; then, through many stages of refining, clearness of expression."<sup>87</sup> Pater is an exponent of, and an advocate for, a highly conscious art, an art that has been through too much, and is too sophisticated for even the Coleridgean version of the poet as mouthpiece.

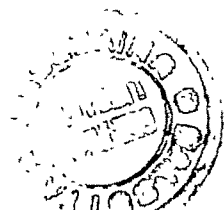
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"The essence of all artistic beauty," writes Pater, "is expression

... the line, the colour, the word, following obediently and with minute scruple the conscious motions of a convinced, intelligent soul.”<sup>88</sup> But if art must follow with such fastidious precision the subtlest motions of the soul, and represent truth in all its complex multiplicity, it was to be expected that, sooner or later, Pater would make a plea for prose. He praises Charles Lamb’s prose in 1878 as “working ever close to the concrete, to the details, great and small, of actual things, books, persons .. ” And by the time we come to ‘Style’, he is convinced that “imaginative prose should be the special and opportune art of the modern world” because it alone is capable of containing “the chaotic variety and complexity of its interests” which make “the intellectual issue, the really master-currents of the time incalculable — a condition of mind little susceptible to the restraint proper to verse form.” Prose, being the “less ambitious form of literature”, is capable of being an instrument of that “all-pervading naturalism”, that tireless search for “real” reality for which poetry is too delicate.

This is not really a retreat into a looser form, for he insists on “the necessity of *mind* in style ... that architectural conception of work which foresees the end in the beginning and never loses sight of it, and in every part is conscious of all in the rest, till the last sentence does but, with undiminished vigour, unfold and justify the first.”<sup>89</sup> He also calls for “soul” in style — “the way ... of absorbing language ... of attracting it into the peculiar spirit they are of, with a subtlety that makes the actual result seem like some inexplicable inspiration.”<sup>90</sup> (This brings us fairly close to Coleridgean Imagination with the critical difference that here the final result only *seems* inexplicable.)

Though it is apparent that Pater came to prose as a superior instrument for the exploration of reality, somewhere along the line, while he was forging his technique, polishing and learning how to manipulate his tools, he must have realised that his crucial point was being lost sight of. This art, too, was becoming a self-contained activity, making no attempt to relate to (*and through*) the moment that was experience and knowledge, the foundation and prison and cross of art. In other words, Pater must have become aware of the dangers of over-emphasising form — of formalism and *its* unreality.



He wrote in 'Measure for Measure'<sup>40</sup> of "that artistic law which demands the *predominance* of form everywhere over the *mere* matter or subject handled." But in 'Style' he states with some degree of finality that we can have great art only when in addition to "mind" and "soul" — "that colour and mystic perfume and that reasonable structure. It has something of the soul of humanity ...", and, even more explicitly, that "the distinction between great art and good art (depends) as regards literature at all events, not its form, but on the matter."

Wellek takes time to task for abandoning the attempt to unify form and content, and for making "a recantation at the expense of any unified, coherent view of art. It gives up the earlier insight into the unity of matter and form ... divides and distinguishes them again and either introduces a double standard of judgment or shifts the burden of criticism to the subject-matter".<sup>41</sup> The "recantation" does indeed damage Pater's critical theory—and it did not require much insight to have been able to see that "the soul of humanity" was bad aesthetics. It begins to make sense only when we try to understand it in the light of his morbid compulsions—the ache for substance upset even Pater's formal poise. He could hardly escape from one glass bubble into another.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The Aesthetic Adventure*, 1945, p. 50.
2. *Selected Letters of Henry James*, ed. L. Edel, New York, 1955, p. 146.
3. 'Aesthetic Poetry', 1868, Included in *Appreciations*, hereafter *Appr.*, 1889.
4. 'English Literature', 1886. Included in *Essays from the Guardian*, 1901.
5. The question of influence is, as always, a difficult one to adjudicate. When one compares Swinburne's 1864 Leonardo essay: "... Fair strange faces of women full of dim doubt and faint scorn, touched by the shadows of an obscure fate; eager and weary as it seems at once, pale and fervent with patience and passion, allure and perplex the thoughts and eyes of men..." with Pater's essay of 1869, it is difficult to say who was being influenced by whom— or were both symptoms of a deeper movement of sensibility?



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11. T. S. Eliot, 'Arnold and Pater', *Selected Essays*, 1932.
12. Quoted in Arnold's *Last Essays on Church and Religion*, 1877.
13. 'Wordsworth', 1874 ; included *Appr*.
14. 'Winckelmann', 1867 ; included *Ren*.
15. 'Two Early French Stories' ; included *Ren*.
16. 'Aesthetic Poetry'.
17. *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1878. Later included in *Miscellaneous Studies*, 1895.
18. *Ren*.
19. 'Conclusion', *Ren*.
20. 'Coleridge', 1880 ; *Appr*.
21. 'Wordsworth'.
22. 'Leonardo da Vinci'.
23. 'On Translating Homer', 1861.
24. 'Preface', 1873 ; *Ren*.
25. *Ibid*.
26. 'Postscript' ; *Appr*.
27. Quoted in G. McKenzie, *The Literary Character of Walter Pater*, 1967.
28. R. Wellek, 'Walter Pater's Literary Theory and Criticism', *Victorian Studies*, September 1957.
29. *Ren*, quoted in Wellek, *op. cit*.
30. "The 'virtue' of each art-object consists in the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique, impression of pleasure." 'Preface', *Ren*.
31. *Essays from the Guardian*, quoted in Wellek, *op. cit*.
32. 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', 1883.
33. It is possible to make sense of Pater's disapproval of Wilde— "that strange vulgarity which Mr Wilde mistakes for cleverness"— in this context : Wilde seems to revel in the breakup of experience and consequent dissolution of responsibility that Pater finds so crippling.

34. 'Style', 1888 ; *Appr.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Quoted in McKenzie, op. cit.
37. *Appr.*
38. 'Plato and Platonism', 1893.
39. 'Style'.
40. 1874. Italics mine.
41. *op. cit.*